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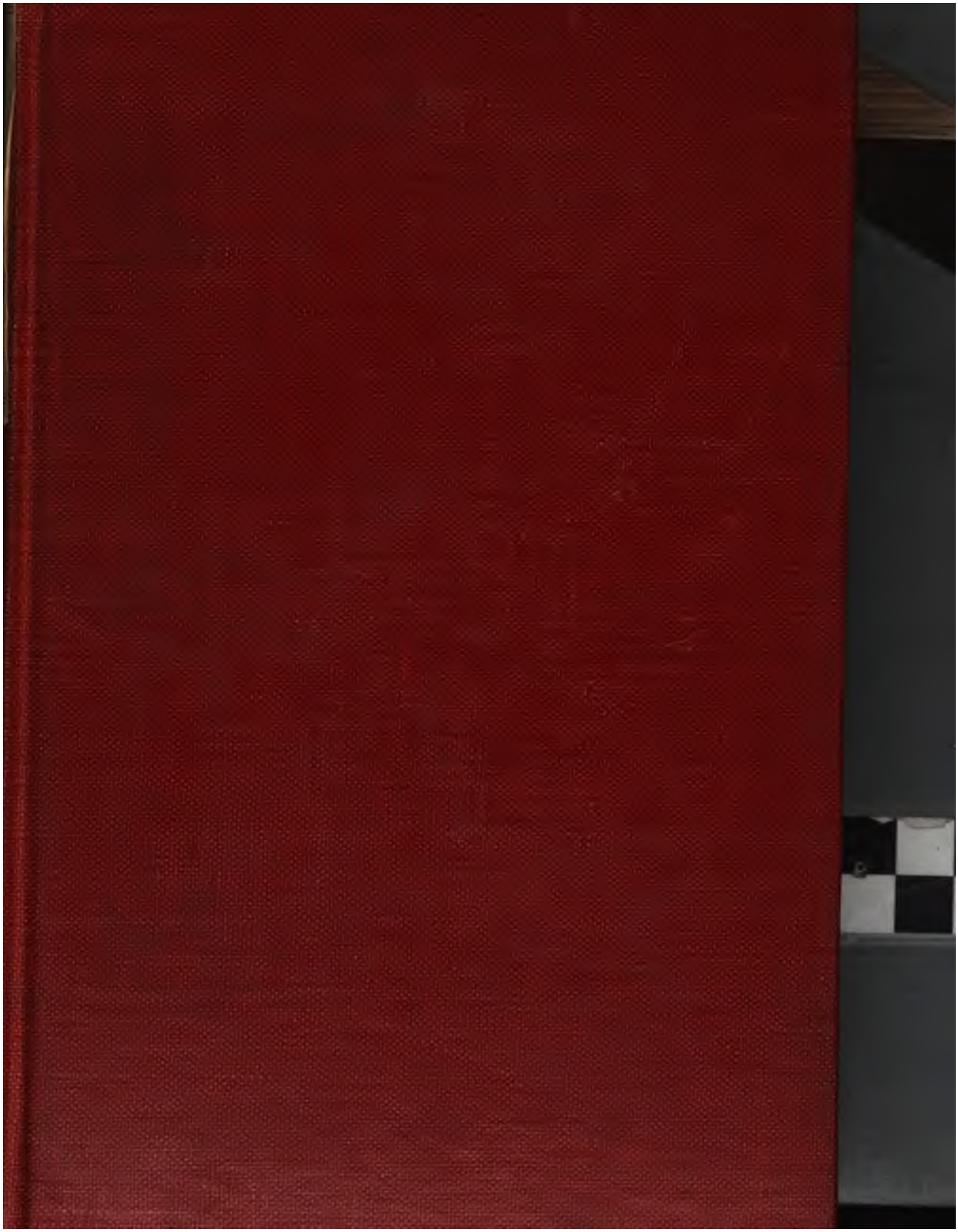

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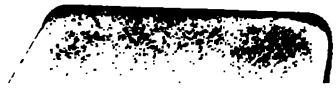

THE WORKS

OF

ALPHONSE DAUDET

LIMITED EDITION

VII.

THE LITTLE PARISH CHURCH

Of the LIMITED EDITION of Alphonse Daudet one thousand copies have been printed for America.

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THE WORKS OF

ALPHONSE DAUDET

THE

LITTLE PARISH CHURCH

TRANSLATED

By GEORGE BURNHAM IVES

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY WILLIAM P. TRENT

ILLUSTRATED BY MARCHETTI

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
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INTRODUCTION.

The Little Parish Church (*La Petite Paroisse*) was published in book form in January, 1895, but had appeared previously in weekly instalments in the pages of *L'Illustration*. It had for its sub-title the phrase "Conjugal Habits" (*mœurs conjugales*) and that he might further enlighten his readers, Daudet added a quotation to the effect that a jealous man has peace neither morning nor night. It was not, therefore, difficult, to conclude that the novel meant a somewhat new departure for its popular author. It was to be neither a story of strenuous Parisian life nor a humorous satire upon Provence, nor even a simple rustic idyl; instead it was to be a psychological study of the most terrible and hateful passion known to man. Yet title, sub-title, and applied quotation alike failed to show that the new book was also to be, in the main, a serious and conscientious "problem novel," in which Daudet intended to suggest some other solution of the perennial question of the fate due to the erring wife than the

ever-present and rather ridiculous revolver of Dumas *fils*.

That he had not attempted a task beyond his powers was at once apparent. The old charm reappeared in the description of the quiet country along the Seine a few miles out of Paris — a setting furnishing an admirable foil to the passionate scenes to be enacted. The old sympathy for humanity in all its aspects reappeared in the excellent description of the passers upon the highway, especially of that pathetic tramp, Père Georges. There were even traces of the spontaneous humor of yore, and everywhere there was evidence that Daudet had by no means abandoned his practice of studying attentively the living document. The psychological power, too, that had been marked in other works again stood him in good stead, and toward the close of the new story there was enough action to satisfy the readers that demanded interest. Clearly *The Little Parish Church*, if a new departure, was by no means a sign that the master's powers were flagging seriously and that he was vainly endeavoring to conceal the fact from himself and his admirers.

When we re-read it, now that Daudet's death has rendered impartial judgment of himself and his works far more possible, we are led to conclude that while this psychological study cannot fairly be ranked as one of its author's indisputable

masterpieces, it is nevertheless an interesting work in itself and quite important to the careful student of Daudet's development. It is interesting because of the power with which the workings of a master-passion, often before depicted, are described in a fairly new setting. It is important to the student of Daudet because, as we have seen, it shows that he was expanding and seeking new outlets for his genius, while still conserving his former strength and charm.

As a matter of course, the interest centres in the betrayed husband, Richard Fénigan whose jealousy, if it plunges him into troubles of every sort, nevertheless makes a man of him, and so allows the genial novelist to solve his problem in an optimistic fashion and to give his story a happy ending. So, too, the sin of the wife, Lydie, being the result of the inconsiderate treatment she receives from her husband and his mother rather than of her own natural propensity to evil, eventually leads to her becoming a true and happy woman after she has repented. In the case of Mme. Fénigan the elder, we have another transformation in which Daudet acknowledges the weakness of his psychology by frankly relying upon the miraculous aid of a sudden religious conversion. She is a strong character, however, and excites our interest, as does also the complex villain of the story, the Prince of Olmütz. This young man is indeed an exaggerated Don Juan,

but he is also a well-studied if idealized impersonation of the decadent young Frenchman of to-day. It was little short of a stroke of genius that induced Daudet to assign to this moral wreck that acute and strenuous criticism of the *personnel* of the French army which almost makes one believe that it must have been written after and not before the Zola trial. If the proud and jealous Duke of Alcantara, the low and crafty Alexandre, the honest but misguided Sautecœur, the time-serving magistrate Delcrous, and the Dickens-like creations, Napoléon Mérivet, founder of the Church of the Little Parish, the Abbé Cérès, and Père Georges, are not drawn in as masterly a fashion as a Balzac or a Shakespeare would have drawn them, they are nevertheless worthy pendants to the main characters and give to the novel a breadth and scope not often attained by the modern psychological study in fiction.

But the Anglo-Saxon reader is inclined to ask questions with regard to the moral relations sustained by the characters of a French novel rather than to doubt their interesting qualities. Is *The Little Parish Church* infected with the disease that vitiates so much French fiction? There can be little doubt that Count Tolstoï and other reactionaries would answer in the affirmative and that not a few English and American readers would agree with them. Yet, as Daudet is clearly above suspicion on the score of deliberately intending to

write vicious fiction, we must examine his novel with considerable care before coming to a decision on this point. Its central theme of conjugal infelicity, so characteristically French, seems to most Anglo-Saxons one to be eschewed; and rightly, since in the hands of our own novelists, it easily lends itself to gross treatment. In the hands of a Frenchman grossness of treatment is the exception, but a subtle sensuality, still more dangerous, pervades the book. Is this to be found in *The Little Parish Church?* Yes, in four or five places where the effects of passion are described with a freedom which meant little or nothing to Daudet and his readers, but which undoubtedly lays modern French fiction partly open to Tolstoï's censures. But these passages are plainly of subordinate interest and importance. The book as a whole was intended to be and is a thoroughly moral one. The sin of Richard and his mother in driving Lydie to crime is expiated by all three in a way that cannot fail to convey a moral warning save to those who revolt against the effects of pathos in fiction. So, too, the pride of the Alcantaras and the sensuality of the Prince receive their proper punishment. The mute devotion of Père Georges and the simple piety of the Abbé Cérès must touch every candid reader and show that Daudet's heart is with his good and true characters. If he has not drawn a single noble character, this merely means that his genius was not at

its height and that his book is not a thoroughly great one; it does not mean that any sound-minded man or woman should avoid it. In short, *The Little Parish Church* can be objected to as a whole only by those extremists who would have sexual questions banished from fiction; but only those with whom freedom of thought has become license will accept with complacency its every detail.

With regard now to the value of the solution Daudet proposes for what French novelists regard as the pressing social problem of their day, opinions may very well vary. The problem does not press in Anglo-Saxon countries, and it is more than likely that the French exaggerate its importance for themselves. Daudet's solution is little more than an application of that "Russian pity" of which he speaks, not with great approbation. Yet, however much the revolver of Dumas *fils* may appeal to our rough and ready notions about redressing injuries, it can hardly be doubted that the restoration of a fallen wife through kind treatment, especially when she is childless, is nearer to the principles of Christianity than severe critics of Russian ideas may like to admit. Society is nowhere yet prepared to accept Daudet's solution, but it is as well that he should have given it for the sake of future generations, which will undoubtedly develop more and more refined conceptions of charity, while eschewing the false sympathy that so moved the indignation of that good French

Parson Adams, the Abbé Cérès — "cette pitié injuste, qui ne va qu'aux coquins et aux gourgandines, qui nous attendrit exclusivement sur les détresses du bagne et autres mauvais lieux, comme si le malheur n'était touchant que dans le crime et dans l'abjection."

With regard now to matters of style, it will hardly be necessary, if indeed it would not be impertinent for a foreigner, to praise Daudet's mastery of word and phrase and subtle prose rhythm. The familiar charm of spontaneity blending with that of the fitting word, *le mot propre*, reappears in *The Little Parish Church*, and the reader derives an additional pleasure from the somewhat unwonted skill with which the parts of the story are joined. Another new element is found in the repeated use of the background formed by the little parish church and the much-frequented highway. The church and the highway play an important part in the emotional development of the two leading characters, and are brought forward much as Egdon Heath is in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and as the panorama of the great city as seen from the heights of Montmartre is presented with rhythmic recurrence in Zola's *Paris*. There is danger, of course, that this device, which is at least as old as Hugo, will be overworked by future novelists, but it is hard to deny that Daudet has made effective use of it.

The special passages and scenes that linger in one's memory and furnish evidence of Daudet's minute care for detail work, are quite as numerous as could be expected. The scene in which Richard feels his jealousy flaming up once more on the first night of Lydie's return is almost if not quite as strong as the somewhat similar scenes, with a different *motif*, in Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*. The close of the chapter devoted to Lydie's retirement near Quiberon, when the electric flash coincides with the report of the pistol with which she is trying to kill herself, and makes her "believe that it is eternity that is opening before her" is finely imaginative, even if it does smack of the sensational. But perhaps there is no more striking passage in the book, from an artistic point of view, than that in which the vile but acutely intelligent young Prince describes the character and fate of the forger, Borski. Strong, too, is the description of the interview between the paralytic Duke of Alcantara and the slayer of his depraved son, the sturdy, passionate gamekeeper Sautecœur.

It is impossible, in conclusion, to read a long story based on a passion so frequently treated as jealousy, without being reminded occasionally of other writers. There is here no question of a French rival to *Othello*, for Daudet, through the mouth of one of his characters, casts a doubt upon the Moor's being a really jealous man which is strikingly like a passage in a forgotten novel of

William Gilmore Simms — an author of whose existence Daudet was in all probability not aware. Whether he thought of *Thérèse Raquin* when he wrote the scene in the bedroom of the Fénigans and when he described the paralytic Duke watching the guilty lovers, is a question it would be hard to settle. For literary indebtedness is not established so easily as some critics imagine. For example, who is to determine whether or not Daudet thought of the Ephesian Matron when he wrote his description of the Prince's adventure with the widow Nansen? He may have thought of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* time and again while writing his novel, just as he makes his reader think of it, and yet he may have had no suspicion that any one would accuse him of poaching on the elder novelist's domain. So, too, the magistrate Delcrous is as plainly a figure borrowed from Balzac's crowded gallery, as Napoléon Mérivet resembles one borrowed from that of Dickens, whom Daudet seems to have known little of; yet he would be an unwary critic who should on any such score accuse Daudet of being wanting in originality. Even the influence of Byron's *Don Juan* upon the conception and development of the character of that youthful debauchee, the Prince of Olmütz, while hardly a matter of doubt, especially when we compare the details of the two shipwrecks undergone by the youths, may have been very indirect and unperceived by Daudet. It is not even certain

CONTENTS.

For precise and orderly minds, for those who like to find on each landing of a house the number of the floor and the names of the tenants, the author deems it to be his duty to place here the chapter titles which, in *L'Illustration*, where *The Little Parish Church* first appeared, assisted in giving clearness to a narrative necessarily interrupted each week, but which are of no use in the book, which one reads, or can read, at a breath.

I. A Bell in the Country.
II. The Prince's Journal.
III. Richard and Lydie. — The Corbeil Road.
IV. Jealousy.
V. Conversation in the Close.
VI. The Prince's Journal.
VII. Intermezzo.
VIII. The Miracle of the Little Parish Church.
IX. The Deserted Mistress.
X. The Prince's Journal.
XI. At the Orphanage.
XII. Poum-poum.
XIII. The Impossible Pardon.
XIV. Market Day.

XV. The Prince's Journal.
XVI. Underbrush.
XVII. The Twofold Scorn.
XVIII. Lydie's Pauper.
XIX. The Night Watch.
XX. The Corbeil Road.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

Photogravured by Goupil & Co., Paris, from Drawings by Marchetti.

The meeting of Prince Charles and Monsieur and Madame Fenigan . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"Now he finds three letters in a fine feline handwriting" 70

"She was free, at last, from the phantasmal apparitions of the fever" 206

"'He is there, you know,' he said, pointing with his cane to the little brick building" 297

THE

LITTLE PARISH CHURCH.

I.

RICHARD FÉNIGAN, an enthusiastic hunter and fisherman of Seine-et-Oise, who lived in the country the year round with his mother and his young wife, had just drawn his nets in that stretch of the Seine, studded with green islets, in which he had taken a lease of the right of fishing, between the locks of Évry and Athis. On that scorching, sultry July morning, beneath a sun of molten metal which made the whole sky gleam like silver, the river steamed, silent and unruffled, without even the twittering as of a well-stocked aviary which the buntings and linnets and bank-swallows usually make in the bushes, while on the other hand the hot vapor intensified the pungent odor of the water plants, and the insipid smell of the cantharides clinging in emerald patches to the ash-trees. Fénigan himself, a robust fellow of thirty-five, with ruddy complexion and thick brown beard, felt the debilitating effect of the atmosphere; and when he approached the little cove where his fish-nets lay

spread like white smoke on the pale green shore, beyond the moored boats, he remained for a few moments exhausted in the bottom of the boat, drowsing in his green canvas clothes, which were stained and black with mud. A bell rang on the hill on that side of the Seine.

"Did you hear, Chuchin?"

Chuchin, the keeper of the preserve, who was half out of sight in the cuddy, counting the pike and tench and eels, raised his tanned face, more wrinkled than the river by an east wind:

"That comes from the Château, for sure."

"But they're not ringing for breakfast. It is barely eleven o'clock."

"A visitor; perhaps some one from Grosbourg. I just saw their victoria returning over the bridge."

The bell rang again in the distance, sounding loud and shrill in the deathlike torpor of the countryside.

"Put everything in order, old Chuchin. I will go up and see."

With the tranquil gait due to his life in the country, Richard followed the towing-path as far as the avenue of poplars leading up a sharp incline to the Corbeil road, along which lay the little village of Uzelles and the estate of that name. As he walked, he thought aloud, puzzled by that alarm-bell, but without any presentiment of evil. A visit from Grosbourg, — that was hardly probable. Who could have come? The general was taking the waters in the Tyrol with the

duchess; the son at Stanislas, grinding for his examinations at Saint-Cyr, which were close at hand. More probably some drama of the servants' quarters or the poultry-yard, necessitating the master's presence. Or else a scene between his mother and his wife. But no, that had been at an end for some years, that horrible private war which had ruined the early years of their married life. What could it be, then?

An obsequious and cat-like "Good-morning, Monsieur Richard," from the other side of the road, roused him from his reflections. There were four or five persons leaning against a great poplar,—Robin the road-mender, Roger the postman, standing by his velocipede which he held by the handle, a laundress seated on the shafts of her heavy barrow filled with dripping linen, all listening, open-eyed and open-mouthed, to the story M. Alexandre was telling them. M. Alexandre was a former maître-d'hôtel at Grosbourg, tall, clean-shaven, faultlessly attired in a complete suit of white flannel, with a black bamboo fishing-rod bound with silver. What was that gossip, abruptly interrupted by Fénigan's arrival? Why that suggestion of irony in the salutation of the retired flunkey, who was usually so servilely respectful? Later, the most trivial details of that morning will recur to his mind with pitiless accuracy; he will find an explanation for all these incidents, which now, having no significance, hardly attract his notice.

In front of the church, white as a new tomb, on the edge of the dusty road, some one else called

him — old Mérivet in a tall hat and long gray blouse, with a brush in one hand and a pot of black paint in the other, busily engaged in touching up, as he said, the inscription on his front door.

"Just look, neighbor; that can be read a league away now."

He stood aside so that his neighbor could admire the newly painted lines on the rough-cast wall at the right of the main doorway:

NAPOLÉON MÉRIVET,
CHEVALIER OF THE ORDER OF SAINT-GRÉGOIRE-LE-GRAND,
BUILT THIS CHURCH
IN MEMORY OF HIS WIFE IRÈNE
AND
PRESENTED IT TO THE VILLAGE OF UZELLES.

That epigraph summarized a domestic drama of which no one in the province had a very clear idea. They knew only that M. Mérivet, on the death of his wife, whom he loved insanely, had built the church opposite his own property, and that he took care of it himself, with his cook for beadle and his valet for sacristan, taking the greatest pride in seeing it full of people on Sunday, when the vicar of Draveil, in whose jurisdiction Uzelles lay, came at nine o'clock to say a short mass. It was in connection with that Sunday service that he had stopped Fénigan as he passed, to complain of the people at the Château. Why on earth should the ladies go to hear mass at Draveil, or at the orphanage at Soisy, when right at their very gates —

"It's too bad, neighbor, much too bad," insisted the little old fellow dipping his brush in the paint; "neither of those churches is equal to mine. My church brings luck. If you had known her under whose patronage I have placed it, if you knew what my Irène's nature was! The Republic writes on its monuments: *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity;* on the pediment of this one I might well write: *Pity, Charity, Forgiveness.* They call us the Little Parish Church — the Good Parish Church would be a more suitable name; for all married people, if they come here to pray, assure the happiness of their households."

Richard made excuses for himself and for the ladies: the very proximity of the church was the main obstacle to their exhibiting their goodwill. They went out so seldom; the Sunday mass at Draveil or the orphanage gave them an opportunity to take the air, to exercise the horses, which were really too fat. But he would mention it to his mother, and before long Mesdames Fénigan would have seats in the Good Church. That last phrase made him smile. He was thinking of the name commonly bestowed in the neighborhood on Père Mérivet's church, a name by no means adapted to attract husbands, — when the bell rang the third time, a hurried and violent peal, and he started forward more rapidly than before.

The Uzelles estate, on the outskirts of the village, consisted of two buildings: the Château, of recent construction, with slated roof, verandah and

balconies, occupied by Madame Fénigan the mother, and separated by a long hedgerow from the Pavilion, an old structure of the last century, where the young couple lived. A small gate in the wall gave ingress and egress to that part of the estate. It was from that gate that Rosine Chuchin, the keeper's daughter, who was in the Fénigans' service, stood with her hands over her eyes watching the road, dazzlingly bright with a reflected glare, and cried to Richard in the distance:

"Is not Madame with you, Monsieur?"

Indeed it often happened that Richard took his wife with him on the river when he went to look at his nets in the morning. She loved to plunge her arms up to the shoulder in the cool water, she loved the surprises awaiting them in the heavy net which they pulled on board, the restless, gleaming silver in its depths. But that morning Lydie was tired and answered all her husband's urging with a sleepy little grunt; a delicious sight as she lay, pink and cool, on her pillow, the light of her blue-gray, pearl-gray eyes stealing out between her drooping lashes. For an instant Richard stood in the middle of the road, gloating over the memory of that amorous husband's vision, while the lady's maid repeated in consternation:

"Is not Madame with you, Monsieur?"

"No, why do you ask?"

"Why, Monsieur, because Madame has not been seen since this morning."

"Not been seen! What nonsense!"

He had the strength to ascend the two steps

leading to the little gate, but sank at once on the stone bench at the beginning of the hedgerow. His indisposition of the morning, the dazed feeling that had seized him on the river, returned with greater violence. Unable to speak or move, he listened to the buzzing of Rosine's chatter, hardly understanding it. They had searched everywhere, — the park, the kitchen-garden, the old building on the bank of the river; at last, just a moment ago, Père Georges, the old tramp, returning from a stroll in the forest, had informed the gardener that one of the gates opening into the wood was open, and handed him a note for the elder Mme. Fénigan. — "However, here comes Mme. Fénigan herself. Perhaps she has some news."

Richard's mother, a haughty, massive creature, always bare-headed, her black hair brushed, or rather drawn flat, was walking along the hedgerow, stirring at every step the patches of bright light with which the shaded ground was dotted. From her excited gait one felt that she had some information, and was in a rage. Richard tried to rise, to go to meet her; but he was powerless to leave his bench, and could only say with anguish in his eyes and the voice he had had when he was a little child:

"Lydie? Where is Lydie, mamma?"

Brutally, almost triumphantly, the mother replied:

"Your wife has gone, my child, and it's the only favor she ever did us."

"Gone!"

"And not alone, as you may imagine. But guess with whom — no, guess."

Instead of guessing, he groaned feebly, trembled convulsively from head to foot, then fell back on the bench, purple in the face, his hands touching the gravel of the path.

II.

THE PRINCE'S JOURNAL.

GROSBOURG, April 6, 1886.

THIS morning, my dear Vallongue, and the mornings that come after, my seat by your side on the preparatory benches at Stanislas will be vacant. It is all over, I renounce Saint-Cyr and the glory in arms with which our family seems to me to be sufficiently provided. From my grandfather, Charles Dauvergne, who was made marshal, Duc d'Alcantara and Prince d'Olmütz by the First Empire, to my poor devil of a father, Alexis Dauvergne, general commanding the Third Corps, stricken with paralysis at forty-seven, my most illustrious ancestors have left me nothing to aspire to. The Russian bowl, in the centre of our large salon on Rue de Chanaleilles, in which we put all the family decorations to pickle, is full to the brim. So what is there for me to do? Nothing. That is a subject upon which I feel that my decision is unalterable. At eighteen years of age, an only son, heir to a great name, to papa's great fortune and doubtless to his deplorable health as well, wisdom counsels me to enjoy as speedily as possible whatever pleasure existence offers me. So I am beginning.

Of the two mysterious letters which you saw me writing the other morning during the trigonometry lecture, one was addressed to Captain Nuitt of Cardiff, and appointed a meeting with him in the little harbor of Cassis, Bouches-du-Rhône, where he is to have the yacht *Red, White and Blue*, with her crew of eight men, cooks and steward, all for ten thousand francs a month. The second notified the person who is to accompany me on my cruise; for you will hardly suppose that I propose to set sail alone. The lady is a stranger to you; at least she does not figure in the cravat drawer in which we have often sorted out together the letters and photographs of my favorites. I may tell you that she is married; our neighbor, opposite Grosbourg, on the other side of the Seine. Barely thirty years old, with long, light eyes always lowered, which, when she opens them, light up her face as with the reflection of a pearl necklace; an air of reserve, large white pianist's hands in old-fashioned mitts. No children, a husband who adores her, and the esteem of the whole province. I had only to write to her: "Come;" she answered: "I fly," and behold her leaving everything, husband, family, home, to take ship with a companion so young and unreliable as your friend. Have n't I told you that women are rare birds?

For my part I care no more for this one than another; I love *all the ladies* too well to prefer any one. As soon as I have tasted one of the delicious melting sweetmeats, I feel like spitting it out and rummaging the box in the hope of finding at

last that super-exquisite flavor which I seek without finding. Wish me better luck this time, my dear Vallongue.

When you receive this letter I shall be under way with all sail set, and the maledictions of my parents will ascend to heaven. So much the worse for them! they are responsible for what is happening. Instead of boxing me up, first at Grosbourg, then at Stanislas, if they had left me with a free hand in Paris, I most assuredly should not have been seized with this sudden itching for running away. But my mother the duchess, who does n't object to being left alone away from her men as she calls us, considered it a very ingenious scheme to force me to work and be virtuous by making me the general's nurse. She did not reflect that solitude is a bad adviser, and that, by dint of staring forever at the hillside of Uzelles with its little white stone church and its steeple in which all the ring-doves in the forest nest, I might perhaps fall into melancholy reflections and feel the need of space. The general finally drove me to flight by shutting me up at Stanislas. I will tell you some day about the drama that was enacted by that illustrious invalid and myself in the privacy of the château, during my residence there.

Ah, Vallongue, how I ruminated over affairs in general, all by myself in the evening in that vast Grosbourg, strolling through the park or along the terrace on the river-bank! How squarely I looked life in the face, and other people, and myself, the most complicated of all! The result of these ex-

aminations was the discovery that I, at eighteen years of age, am old and weary, utterly without ambition, loving nothing, interested in nothing, always looking forward to the end of any pleasure, whatever it may be. Why am I thus? Whence comes this precocious experience, this distaste for everything, and these wrinkles which I feel even at the ends of my fingers? Can they be common to my generation, to those of us who have been called "children of the conquest," because we were born about the time of the war and the invasion, or are they simply peculiar to my family, to the old soil exhausted by too many abundant crops, and demanding now to lie fallow for a long while. *Jour de Dieu!* I will undertake to see that it lies fallow.

And first of all, women and boating being in my eyes the only desirable forms of distraction, I offer them both to myself, and in abundance. Hitherto, as lover and as sailor, I have fired only experimental broadsides; this time I am off for a long cruise, and if my confidences interest you, my dear Wilkie, I propose to keep for your benefit a perfectly truthful journal or logbook of the travels and adventures of a soul which the general-duke, my father, has long proclaimed to be as obscure and perilous as a battle at night.

III.

LIKE all the rooms in the Pavilion, Richard's bedroom, to which he was taken after his syncope, looked on the Corbeil road, which ran along the edge of a high bank overlooking the river and was one of the most animated and cheerful roads in Seine-et-Oise. Along that same road, thirty-five years earlier, one October morning in 1851, Maître Fénigan, notary at Draveil and landed proprietor at Uzelles, with his neighbor of Grosbourg, the old Duc d'Alcantara, had walked through a brisk autumn shower which took them unawares, to report at the mayor's office at Draveil the birth of the little boy who had arrived during the night. The duke, who had chanced to call upon his notary that morning, had insisted upon giving him that proof of his esteem; and the long journey on foot, under a secondhand umbrella, the humble country notary walking arm-in-arm with the illustrious soldier of Napoléon, left a no less glorious trace in the annals of the house of Fénigan than the great marshal's signature on the modest register of the commune.

The mother was ailing for a long while after the tardy advent of little Richard. For several years she was unable to leave her invalid's chair, and as

the father passed all his time away from the house, absorbed by the duties of his office, the child, being the invalid's only source of distraction, grew up by her side, alone, as if in a cloister, driven early in life to silence and reverie, in that room where there was naught to amuse him save the panorama of the highroad with its stream of wagons, carriages, men and cattle, carriers, shepherds, market-gardeners and camlet cloaks. So he soon came to know it by heart, that white road, a veritable panorama in which his eager, patient little eyes could discover a thousand details which others did not suspect. The road marked the hours for him more surely than the sun-dial on its pedestal in the centre of the lawn. In summer, when Robin the roadmender stopped his barrow in the short shadow of the wall opposite, beside the fountain, the child would think aloud: "Robin's luncheon; it is one o'clock." And it was his delight to see the man and his two little ones seat themselves by the roadside with the barrow for a table; then, when the meal was at an end, the table became an easy-chair, a broad, if somewhat hard couch, on which the road-mender would stretch his limbs for his siesta, while the little ones played quietly a few feet away, making pretty piles of stones like their father's. In like manner, when the women came up from the washing, when the cattle disappeared through the great gateway of the neighboring farm with a noise like the pattering of rain, or when the children, returning from school at Draveil, separated at the corner by the

fountain, Richard knew that it was four, five or six o'clock.

As the road answered the purpose of a clock for him, so it served him as a calendar, indicating each day of the week by some distinctive mark. On Monday the poor,—a slow, endless procession of rags and crutches, come from heaven knows where, and always the same haggard, earthy faces appearing at the wicket in the great gate to receive from Madame Clement, the gardener's wife, two sous and a crust of bread. Saturday was the day for wedding-parties after the style of ancient France: the violinist at the head, dislocating his hips to mark the time, turning the village topsy-turvy with his fiddle. Behind him the bride, in white, flushed and perspiring beneath her orange-flowers, and the husband gathering up all the cinders from the road on his silk hat and his black broadcloth coat; then the guests, two by two, the women proudly dragging the fringes of their huge shawls in the dust, the men embarrassed at exhibiting themselves in the middle of the street on a working day, dressed in their Sunday best with their arms dangling at their sides. On Mondays and Thursdays, the day before Corbeil market-day, immense herds of cattle passed, and peddlers who sometimes stopped their vans in front of the Château to display their wares. On Sundays in summer singing societies marched by, their banners resplendent with medals won in competition; the firemen paraded too. The autumn brought detachments of troops and heavy guns which shook the

house as they rumbled by in a long line, and soldiers crowding around the fountain, fighting for a drink, despite the frantic shouts of the major. At other times great hunting breaks carried toward the forest that lined the road the guests from the neighboring châteaux, Grosbourg, La Grange, Mérogis, wagon-loads of new game-bags and weapons that glistened in the red sunlight.

But the day of all the week that held the most attraction for Richard, the day for whose coming he watched most feverishly, was Thursday, when, about three in the afternoon, a medley of youthful voices chattered beneath his windows, and the orphans from Soisy-sous-Étiolles passed by, under the direction of two or three white hoods, filling the whole road with their straw hats trimmed with blue ribbons and their long shoulder-capes. They were almost always invited into the Château, to play and eat on the lawn. What a fête for Richard, who knew no other children than those poor little girls, to whom he appeared like a young king in that frame of flowery magnificence; and with what a heart-broken gaze, after the games and the races and the loud laughter among the paths, did he follow their departing forms as far as the turn in the road along the cliff, the good sisters' hoods fluttering like white wings in the cool breeze from the river!

Oh! that Corbeil road, what a place it occupied in his memory! His childhood and his youth were crossed, so to speak, by a broad, dusty highway, whereon the great events of his life succeeded one

another. It was upon that road, between Draveil and Uzelles, at the corner since marked by an iron cross, that Maître Fénigan, as he was returning from his office, was stricken with apoplexy and fell. Richard was sixteen at that time, and, being hastily summoned from Louis-le-Grand, where he was slowly and painfully pursuing his studies, found some consolation for the sorrow caused by that tragic death in the hope that he would not be sent back to the college. That exile of young Fénigan had been the subject of violent disputes at the notary's; the mother wished to keep her son at home with a tutor, the father insisted upon university education and discipline, fearing that Richard, if he lived alone in the country, would become as wild and boorish as the roadmender's children. Although usually very weak in his opposition to his wife, whom he called "his kind tyrant," Maître Fénigan stuck to his guns on that occasion; deaf to her tears and her imprecations, he himself took Richard to Paris and boxed him up between the high black walls from which he would never have come forth until his studies were finished, except for the mournful despatch summoning him to Uzelles, an orphan.

How lovely that road of his seemed to him as he followed the hearse, all alone in front of an enormous, silent multitude! The grain was high in the fields, the waves of wheat shone resplendent in the sunshine. At every step memories of his childhood rose and flew before him; from the woods and the river were wafted familiar odors

which bewildered him, and he reproached himself for a feeling of contentment despite his tears, for a thrill of joy at finding himself once more in presence of those familiar scenes, which he loved with all his instincts, from which he had found it so painful to tear himself away. And to think that now he was to leave them no more! Therein he was in perfect accord with his mother, who thought as she watched from her window the passing of the long procession: "Why should he return to Paris? What is the use of completing his studies, which have been thus far of no benefit to him? What is the use of having him follow in his father's footsteps, and of depriving myself of my only child, when our fortune is made?"

On the day following his return to Uzelles Richard packed all his school-books in a chest, which he nailed up with feverish haste and consigned to the garret, firmly resolved never to open it again nor any of the hateful old volumes that had tortured him so long. Like almost all petty bourgeois brought up in the country, he was of an indolent and dreamy disposition, shy even to savagery, speaking little, aroused by nothing except exercise in the open air, fishing and riding, which he carried to excess, never reading a book or a newspaper, unless it were the *Chasse Illustrée*, and now and then a number of the *Tour du Monde*. He rose early and his mother never saw him except at meals; however, he rarely went out in the evening, but played two games of chess with her,

which carried them to ten o'clock, the hour at which all lights were invariably extinguished in the Château and the offices. They had few visitors; Mme. Fénigan's long illness had separated them from their friends at Draveil and Soisy, and although the widow was very well now, she was too happy with her tall son to renew the relations that had been interrupted.

Ten years passed in that monotonous, unruffled existence. An invitation now and then from their aristocratic neighbors at Grosbourg at the opening of the hunting season, a trip to Hâvre to purchase a little sloop to which Richard had taken a fancy, were the epoch-marking incidents of his life in those ten years. And then, two summers in succession, certain cousins of the Fénigans from Lorient visited at Uzelles, — the father and mother and a very young girl who was always seen on horseback, in a little felt hat, riding about with her cousin. From Villeneuve-Saint-Georges to Corbeil, throughout the whole region where the Fénigans' handsome fortune had made their name popular, there was for a moment a report of Richard's impending marriage; then, the family from Lorient having suddenly disappeared, the same persons who certified to the correctness of the news were the first to deny it. With his bull-neck, his beard growing to his eyes, the bulky fellow was a mild, weak creature, entirely under his mother's domination; and Mme. Fénigan loved him far too well to allow any other woman than herself to enter and install herself in the house. That fact was

established on the day when the young amazon from Lorient believed herself to be most certain of success, on returning from a ride with her cousin, during which his dreamy silence seemed to her decisive: Mme. Fénigan had but to glance at her son, to say a single word: "Do you mean anything?" — "Hardly," replied the young man, knocking the ashes from his English pipe upon his boot, and with them his ephemeral amorous fancy. The next day the young woman took her leave, without any further reference to that tacit betrothal. Some time after, however, young Fénigan married, nor did his mother place any obstacle in his way.

In pursuance of a very old custom, dating from Richard's infancy, the Soisy orphanage came to lunch at Uzelles on Thursdays during the summer. Mme. Fénigan resigned herself to that burden, not so much for the sake of the little girls, who would have preferred to eat their cakes outside on the dusty road, as for the pleasure of meeting the nuns, almost all of whom were women of great distinction and refinement. One Thursday, when Richard happened to have remained at home and so witnessed this weekly visit from the orphans, he asked his mother during the luncheon:

"Who is that tall girl, that pale, slender creature, with eyes of a silvery, velvety gray, who stood all the time close to Sister Martha, the Irishwoman?"

"Why, that's Lydie, little Lydie."

"What, that horrible little gypsy?"

And suddenly, amid the multitude of blear-eyed,

scrofulous abortions, faces of misery and vice, towering above those unfortunate little waifs, he saw again the proud and melancholy face beneath the fine, curly hair that escaped from the shabby straw hat. That creature, little Lydie! That child of the road, of the gutter, picked up in a mass of disgusting rags fifteen years before, so transformed!

"If you could hear her on Sundays, at the organ in the chapel! Ah! the Irishwoman may well be proud of her work, that little Lydie is simply perfection. I call her little, but she's as tall as I am."

The next Sunday for the first time Richard accompanied his mother to mass at the orphanage; and throughout the service he did not once remove his eyes from the delicate profile leaning over the organ at the rear of the choir. Oh! no, she could not be a foundling like the others, she did not spring from the same impure source. How otherwise could one explain those aristocratic instincts, that genius for music which aroused Sister Martha's wondering admiration?

Richard went to mass at Soisy several times; on Thursday he remained at home for the orphans' collation. One day Mme. Fénigan persuaded the sister to play a sonata for four hands with her pupil on the piano in the salon, which had almost outlived its usefulness and gave forth shrill little notes like a spinet. Richard went out before the end of the performance. "I was too warm," he said roughly, when his mother tried to make him

confess his emotion. And yet from that day the poor boy was constantly humming that sonata, and trying to pick out the air on the piano with heavy, hesitating fingers. He continued his active life, however, hunting, visiting his nets with the keeper, but was more taciturn than ever, keeping his teeth tightly clenched on the secret which his mother divined, which she at last succeeded in extorting from him.

"Guess whom we shall have to dine with us next week," she said to him one evening, between two games of chess.

And as he, being completely absorbed by his dream, did not reply, she continued:

"The Bishop of Versailles. He is coming to say mass at the orphanage on the occasion of Lydie's taking the veil."

"So she is going to enter the convent, is she?"

"What do you suppose will become of her, without means, without family? It's very fortunate for her that the sisters don't require any dowry."

Richard, changing color, left the chess-board and disappeared in the darkness of the garden. Mme. Fénigan found him in a little châlet that was used as a tool-house and armory, standing with his forehead against the window on which the moon was shining brightly.

"Naughty boy! Why didn't you tell me that you loved her?"

"Oh! mamma — mamma —"

Those two words, the only ones he was able to utter, came vehemently forth from his swollen, feverish lips, while the tears that gushed from his eyes rushed down the panes like a shower of rain, and his whole sturdy body shivered. Did he love her, great God! But he would never have dared to confess it, dreading a refusal.

"Silly, silly boy!" scolded the mother gently, "as if I had any other ambition than your happiness!"

The fact that he had chosen that pauper, that orphan, counted for much in his mother's indulgence; for a child who owed them everything would never think of introducing a new authority into the household, of setting up a will in opposition to that of Mme. Fénigan, who had reigned alone so long.

Lydie at once accepted his offer of marriage. Did she accept joyfully? Or had she, on the other hand, some regret for a husband of a different sort of whom she had dreamed? No one could say. On Richard's first visit, when he came to pay his court to her in the parlor with its white curtains and white walls, where the image of the Virgin, adorned with a drooping chaplet, and a Saint Vincent de Paul in gilded wood stood opposite each other, she welcomed him with an artless, affectionate smile, seeming as much at ease in her little pauper's cap and her shocking cape as the most richly endowed and most highly connected fiancée. She was, like him, a self-concentrated, silent creature; but the timidity of the most timid

of women does not resemble a man's, for the woman retains, in spite of everything, the consciousness, the assurance of her charm. Moreover, of those two beings, one did not love as yet, whereas the other, as if paralyzed by his passion, could not utter a word. His confusion was so profound, so sincere, that the young girl herself was affected by it, and they remained a moment, motionless and embarrassed, without speaking.

Luckily, the Corbeil road, which passed in front of the small-paned windows of the parlor, came to the relief of their embarrassment. The orphan girl was familiar with its most trivial details, having, like Richard, passed hours and hours looking through the window. They talked of it as of a fairy play which they had both seen on the stage, and whose incidents and characters they described to each other. Oh! Robin's wheelbarrow; and the little Robins, grown men now, but always replaced by other little Robins wearing the old breeches and patched jackets of the older ones. Oh! the little hunchbacked shoe peddler; and the Turk in thread-bare furs who passed by every autumn with his bear, of which Lydie was so afraid when she was a child; less afraid, however, than of Père Georges and his long stick. Could any one explain the whim of that horrible old tramp, who persisted in following the orphans in their promenade, but only when Lydie was there? The girl dreamed about him at night, and she dared not go out on Thursdays. At last, to get

rid of the old madman, they had had to threaten him with the gendarmerie.

"Do you know that Père Georges is still alive, Mademoiselle Lydie?"

"I know it, Monsieur Richard, but now I am not afraid of him any more, although he still has his great stick, and when he passes me he mutters things in his Alsace patois."

One person whom they no longer saw was the Soisy pastry-cook, a dear old granny, feeble and bent, but neat as wax, who used to trot along the road at the hour for vespers on Sunday, in a great white apron, and under her arm a basket covered with a white napkin, from which arose a delicious odor of hot pastry. Notwithstanding her great age, she supplied all Soisy, Uzelles, even Draveil, and was very proud of having the custom of Château Fénigan, so that, when she stopped at the orphanage, she would say in a respectful tone to the children as they fumbled in her basket and attempted to encroach on her reserve stock:

"Take care, Mademoiselle — that's Monsieur Richard's little vanilla." That story of the little vanilla, which Lydie told very funnily, imitating the old woman's trembling reverence, made them laugh till the tears came; but the orphan was careful not to confess that in those days she shared the old woman's veneration for the little vanilla, for M. Richard himself and for all the inmates of the Château.

Another thing that she did not tell — a woman, however young she may be, whether through dis-

trust or discretion, conceals her private feelings, especially those that have been tested most fully— was the impression left upon her childish mind by the Thursday visits to Uzelles, where the tall trees, the rich green of the lawn, caressed her wide-open eyes quite as much as the sumptuous hangings, the decorations on the ground floor, of which she caught a glimpse through the open door.

Whence did that wretched little creature derive that taste, that precocious, instinctive liking for wealth and aristocracy? Why was it that of all the innumerable spectacles which the high road unrolled before her, nothing interested her, nothing made her heart beat like the superb carriages driving toward the station, with gorgeous crests on their panels, drawn by four horses and driven by powdered coachmen or lackeys? Must we believe the story told by the nuns, that Lydie was born in some château in the vicinity, and that time would reveal the mystery of her life, a thrilling, emblazoned romance? At all events, the sisters so explained the joyous "yes" with which the young novice, on the eve of taking the vows, welcomed Richard's offer, renouncing abruptly, for the perilous tumult of the world, the white headgear of the sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul, which seemed certain to be so becoming to her bright eyes and her innocent forehead?

The marriage took place in the chapel of the convent, on Saturday, as the custom is in the country. But the Corbeil road had seen no such wedding procession within the roadmender's

memory. All the former clients of the Fénigan office, from the farmer at Les Bergeries to the châtelain of Grosbourg, were present, offering that last act of homage to a type that has now become rare, — an honest country notary. Before the long line of carriages, at the head of which was the bride's coupé, stretched the road, broad and smooth, beneath a lovely June sun; at the corner of the Soisy road, before reaching the orphanage, where the bishop was awaiting the young couple, it rose higher and higher, lost itself in the sky, a boundless sky of blue silk, without a fold, without a cloud.

"I will make whatever I choose of her," the mother-in-law had promised herself; and therein lies the explanation of her acceptance of that portionless child, without name or kindred, that yielding creature with the large, white, drooping hands. She whom Maître Fénigan used to call his "kind tyrant" was a woman of an absolutely contrary type. Active, energetic, rattling as she moved her skirts a bunch of keys as numerous as the locks in the château, Mme. Fénigan at fifty-five, when her son was married, seemed hardly more than forty; her black tresses, always flying in the air, refusing to submit to any sort of head-dress, were still as black as her eyes, which were small, restless and kindly, but of a Jansenistical type of kindliness, lacking warmth and tenderness. To induce her to kiss her son, that son whom she loved above everything, some extraordinary thing must have happened. "In our family we are not

fond of licking," she would frequently say. Furthermore, she had a craving for authority, her widowhood had accustomed her to live as she chose; and, as a result of the outspokenness of her despotism, she was soon at odds with her daughter-in-law.

In the first place, she was opposed to a wedding journey. Richard cared but little about it; so long as he had his wife to himself, entirely to himself, it mattered little to him where he was. Indeed his excessive shyness took fright at the idea of leaving home, with the hotels, the breakfasts and dinners, the necessity of speaking to strangers in places where he had never been. To Lydie, on the contrary, travelling represented the acme of legitimate happiness, for in her sedentary life at the convent she had never longed for anything but that, to see other places, to go far, far beyond the hill-side opposite, and to descend one slope, then another, farther than the eye could see.

"It's from having looked at the road too much," she said to Richard during their long conversations before their marriage; and she confessed to him that her longing for more room was so intense that she sometimes envied the most wretched travelling mountebanks — yes, their evening meal on the edge of a ditch, their midday halts under the dusty elms. Beside himself with passionate admiration when he saw her cheeks all rosy with enthusiasm, he would promise: "We will travel, Lydie." What would he not have promised at such moments? But now he said nothing, seemed

to consider his mother's reiterated objections perfectly reasonable. In her time people did n't take wedding journeys. Nothing could be more dangerous. How many young wives had paid with their lives for following that idiotic tradition! "And if you knew, my dear girl, what a trial it is for a young bride, for her modesty, her delicacy! Take my advice, give it up."—Lydie did not insist, but of her repressed longing was born a grudge which endured. Hitherto she had been grateful to her mother-in-law, now she had a feeling that in her house she was in prison, and she thought of nothing but making her escape; as for her husband, whom she was entirely disposed to love, as she saw him always with hanging head and eyes that avoided hers, so cowardly and childish under his great beard, she began to despise him and accustomed herself not to rely upon him.

The young people were quartered in the old Pavilion, but took their meals at the Château with Madame, as the mother was called. Seated at the head of the table, Madame carved in the old-fashioned way, distributed the tea, coffee, sugar and liqueurs. When breakfast was over, the young couple disappeared. In the beginning the mother tried to keep her daughter-in-law with her, to initiate her into the numerous duties of mistress of the house, which are so complicated in the country, with pilfering firmly established everywhere, in the garden, in the kitchen, in the poultry-yard, enveloping the whole domain in a network of trickery and falsehood. But Lydie was so bored by the

repetition of her domestic troubles, Richard's back assumed such a comical, overburdened curve, that the mother dismissed them and resigned herself to the necessity of counting her pears all alone, of picking up the windfalls, of watching for the baskets of stolen fruit and the devastations of the dormice, — those terrible dormice, less guilty than her gardener, who charged his own misdeeds to them. And as she bustled about she thought how deceived she had been in regard to the tall, shiftless creature whom she hoped to guide as she chose. For all her apparent metamorphosis, Lydie was still the same satanic little gypsy as before, the embodiment of disorder and independence. To accompany her husband hunting or fishing, to assist him in making cartridges, interested her far more than sewing or embroidery.

"But you must learn to become a good housekeeper, my dear daughter."

"Why so, Madame, when I have no house to keep, and you choose to take charge of everything here?"

"But I shall not always be here."

Discussions of this sort, which were of frequent occurrence between them, were especially frequent in the calèche that took them to Corbeil once a week, and they made even more hateful to Lydie the interminable drive through the venerable little town and the halts in the market-place, where Mme. Fénigan persisted in recognizing fruits and vegetables from her kitchen-garden.

"Look, would n't you say those were our mel-

ons? And those egg-plants! they don't have them anywhere except Grosbourg and our place. I am perfectly sure that they were all stolen."

And she would tell again the everlasting story of the baskets that passed under her nose, bulging out with fruit, and flew over the walls of the orchard, let her watch as closely as she would. Luckily the young woman had, to distract her thoughts both going and returning, the memories which she gathered up along the road as the wheels rolled on, and of which she was never weary. She saw herself, a little child, running through the dust in the long cape and the hat with blue ribbons, and when the calèche passed through the main street of Soisy-sous-Étiolles, the orphan always felt the same thrill of proud delight as she drove by the windows of her convent.

In the evening after dinner they sat in the salon. Richard played chess with his mother as in the old days; but Lydie's piano caused his mind to wander. As it happened, that uncivilized creature was passionately fond of music, and as he had never heard any except at the hands of the wife whom he adored, the two forms of intoxication became blended in one, which drove him wild.

His glance wandered at every instant from the chess-board to the pure profile of the musician, to the movement of her long hands, whiter than the keys; and when a gesture, an impatient, jealous word recalled him to the game, he moved the pieces in an absent-minded way, accompanying with his

deep, untrained bass voice the sonata Lydie was playing: "Poum-poum-poum."

"Hush, Richard, it's confusing!" his mother would exclaim.

But how many times he would begin again his "Poum-poum," before bedtime, ten o'clock, the invariable curfew hour at the Château!

There was still another obligation to which the young couple could not readily resign themselves. It would have been so pleasant to walk about out-of-doors, on the moonlit road, or in the woods, among the clumps of birches which looked like ghosts in the silvery light. But no, all the doors and gates were closed, all the keys hung by Madame's bedside; and when Richard and his wife tarried a moment in the cool air of the park, Athos and Porthos, two huge watchdogs, barked so long and so loudly that, the promenaders preferred to go into the house.

One of the windows in their pavilion, that in the dressing-room, looked out on the plains of Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, in the direction of Paris, whose location was vaguely indicated by a great halo of light smoke. Lydie passed many moments at that window in the evening, hypnotized by the seductive, distant glare. Oh! that Paris, so near at hand, only a paltry seven or eight leagues, but whither she was never allowed to go! Another instance of Mme. Fénigan's tyranny. "Why should you go to Paris, my dear girl? Do I ever go there? Did my son ever go there before you came?" She never replied, she no longer even became in-

dignant at that unjust autocracy, which deprived her of all the pleasures which her youth and healthy energy craved. But Richard would have trembled could he have seen certain glances which she bestowed upon that volcano-like glare during her pensive loitering at the open window.

On one occasion, however, Mme. Fénigan's prejudices yielded to the insistence of their neighbors of Grosbourg. The d'Alcantaras owned the hunting privilege in the forest of Sénart, along the outskirts of which lies the hamlet of Uzelles, and they never failed, when the season opened, to invite Richard, who was an excellent hunter, knowing his forest like a poacher. He had simply to walk across his park and through his gate, and was always the first at the rendezvous by the pheasant house. On the opening morning, the year following Lydie's marriage, the general and his guests found Fénigan awaiting them, accompanied by a pretty little huntress all in green velvet, booted and gaitered, with a Tyrolean hat on her fine, ashen-hued hair. — "My wife, general," said Richard, presenting her. She was so deliciously youthful and slender, with such lovely teeth, that the general never left her throughout the hunt and would have her at his side during the luncheon in the woods; and when they parted he insisted that Richard should bring his wife to Grosbourg.

The mother did not look with favor on that suggestion. Since the notary's death the two families had not been on intimate terms; the general had married the only daughter of Baron Silva, a wealthy

Viennese banker, whose enormous dowry had arrived in the nick of time to clear the Grosbourg entail of incumbrances, to save from ruin those spendthrift Dauvergnes, rakes and gamblers from generation to generation. The haughty Austrian considered the Fénigans too inconsiderable for her. "Especially since Richard's marriage," the mother would add, losing no opportunity to checkmate her daughter-in law's independent inclinations and remind her of her origin.

Suddenly, early in the winter, came a letter from the general-duke, inviting the mother and the young couple, in the duchess's name, to pass the evening in the Dauvergne box at the Opéra, on the occasion of somebody's début a fortnight hence. Mme. Fénigan, being exceedingly flattered, by that attention, urged the young people to accept.

"For my part, I am too old, but you two — you hear, Lydie — you must go. I will pay for your dress."

"Thanks, mamma," replied Lydie, flushing with pleasure; for a long time she had called her "Madame," like the servants.

For a fortnight she lived in a dream. Her dress, which was ordered in Paris, necessitated divers little journeys, followed by the presence at Uzelles of a dressmaker of elegant figure, with faded, puffy features bearing the stamp of dissipation, who dozed sitting upright in chairs, as if to make up irreparable arrears of sleep. That problematical personage knew Parisian society root and branch,

and, while trying on the dress, dilated on the scandalous underside of life at Grosbourg, the general frantic after every woman he saw, the duchess not in the least jealous, caring for nothing but her son and money. After the dressmaker came the hairdresser, not the one at Corbeil whom Lydie had been content to employ for her wedding, but a hairdresser from Paris, recommended by Mlle. Hortense, the dressmaker's deputy.

Ah! when, after so much labor and trouble, she took her seat at the front of the huge box, facing that brilliant hall, her bare arms and shoulders emerging from her Empire gown, she, the poor waif, the child of the high road, who had never seen a theatre until she was twenty-four — her sensations were different from anything she had ever known, as if all her nerves had gone mad. Her eyes hurt her, they felt so unnaturally sharp and brilliant. What they were acting, what that little fat man in a tight doublet, with jerky gestures, was singing down there on the stage, the strains of the orchestra rising and falling like a melodious tide, — all was lost so far as Lydie was concerned, because of the violent throbbing of her heart and her temples. She did not even hear the impertinent salutation of the duchess, a little Viennese with a blotched face, lemon-colored hair, a profile like a sheep, and a neck, too long for her body, swathed in three strings of pearls, the largest the orphan had ever seen.

Suddenly she was snatched from that vague rolling mist in which she was floating like a jelly-fish

whose brilliant coloring vanishes when it is taken from the water. The general, who was seated behind her, had already, as he leaned over to look around the hall, brushed his neighbor's pretty shoulders several times with the ends of his long red moustache; then she felt that her hand was grasped, held tight in a gauntlet of steel and fire. Highly indignant at first, she tried to struggle; but the gauntlet persisted in detaining that flexible little hand, powerless at last against its amorous, brutal pressure. — Lydie nearly fainted. "What audacity! How he squeezes me, how he burns me! But they will see us — the duchess — my husband." And what terrified her more than all was the general's tranquil impudence, chatting on indifferent subjects. For the first time worldly hypocrisy was exhibited to her and offended her scrupulous, still straightforward nature. Why, at the first sign from the duchess, who rose long before the end and said in her nasal voice: "I am bored to death, let us go!" why did the duke instantly stand up and go out with her in the middle of the act, leaving the little hand thunderstruck and indignant to find itself dropped as unceremoniously as it was taken? "Oh! indeed, just let Monsieur le Duc d'Alcantara try it again, crushing my fingers a whole evening — he will get a warm welcome!" And amid the final crash of the orchestra, left alone with Richard who was dozing in the back part of the box, she waxed excited and planned the stinging reply she would make to the general, for she was sure that he would not stop there.

As they entered the cab on leaving the theatre, Lydie, who was very excited, agitated by her adventure — doubtless the crowd, the electric lights, the animation of a night in Paris after the theatre were partly responsible — Lydie said to her husband: "Suppose we have some supper?" He gazed at her in stupefaction. How did she come by such an idea? What about their train, the twelve-fifty train which they must take at the Lyon station? They had barely time to catch it! — "A fig for the train! We will sleep at a hotel." And with that she threw about his neck two such caressing arms, kissed his lips with a kiss of such a novel savor, that the poor husband spared her the "What will mamma say?" which she was expecting, and replied simply: "Let us go and have supper."

To the end that everything in the young wife's experience that night might come as a surprise to her, her companion, who was usually so timid that he dared not enter a shop alone or speak to a clerk, was bewilderingly self-possessed and jovial, addressing the waiters at the night restaurant familiarly and pouring bumper after bumper of champagne; a husband whom she had never known before, whom she was never to see again, talkative, effusive, swearing that they would repeat that little spree every month, and if his mother made any objection, why he 'd send her to her dormice without mincing matters. At two o'clock in the morning the young couple wandered in a cab through a cold, silent Paris, in quest of lodgings, several

hotels having refused them admission as suspicious characters, which made them laugh heartily. Stranded at last on Rue Montmartre, they retained an ineradicable remembrance of the enormous room assigned to them, of the worn floor, of the threadbare rug. When Lydie, having taken off her dress, found herself almost naked in that fireless room, she shivered from head to foot. "I am cold," she said, pulling the bedclothes up very high. But the bedclothes fell back. In his innocence Richard tried at first to fasten the towels around his wife's arms and shoulders by way of night-dress. They would not stay, they were too rough for her soft skin. She laughed, with little shrieks: "That scratches me, that scratches me." Not until then did he understand, throw everything aside, bedclothes, towels, laces, seize her in his arms as he had never dared to do before, from loving respect and passionate dread; and that was their first night as lovers.

But the next day, the return to Uzelles! The servants talked in undertones with dismay on their faces. Madame had gone to bed, ill, after sitting up until morning. For a whole week she did not go down to the salon, and if she forgave Richard for his escapade, there was no reconciliation between her and her daughter-in-law. Lydie ventured once or twice, however, to remind her husband of his promise to repeat their little spree; but the poor fellow's dismay was so comical as he murmured, all his features sinking out of sight in his beard: "It would be mamma's death!" that

the young wife, with a feeling of pitying contempt for his weakness, renounced the idea, as she renounced the hope of ever seeing again the brilliant, amorous husband, all aflame with audacity and determination, whom she had loved for a single night, only one.

Of the general and his gallant overtures she heard nothing more. No letter, no call; and the thought that that old trooper with the great, lustreless eyes and purple cheek-bones had amused himself with her for a whole evening but had not considered that she was worth any further notice, seemed so insulting to Lydie that she longed to be revenged or to complain. But what could she do with such a limp rag of a husband as hers? One more disappointment to add to the others, to be relegated to a place among a multitude of humiliating memories, with the dress made by the great modiste and folded away in the bottom of a trunk, that evening dress which she never wore, which she never even looked at, finding that her regrets were too bitter.

"Has Madame heard of the accident that has happened at Grosbourg?" Rosine asked one evening as she was undressing her mistress.

The general, who had been very ill for some time as the result of a fall from his horse, which he had kept secret at first, had been removed to the Château, entirely paralyzed. Rosine Chuchin had learned about it from M. Alexandre, the former steward at Grosbourg, who was living on his income at Uzelles, and who dressed so well and

was so perfumed and becurled that he drove all the belles in the neighborhood to despair, despite his age and his complexion. Upon hearing that sad news, which explained everything, Lydie had no other feeling than pity for the hero stricken down in his pride and his strength, in full flight toward glory and the realization of his ambition.

As she was riding through the forest with her husband some time after, they met, on a grass-grown road just wide enough for its wheels, a half-closed landau in which sat a tall old man, pensive and preoccupied, beside a younger man in spectacles with long curly hair. —"The general — did you see him?" Richard asked his wife in an undertone; his hunter's eyes never made a mistake. The general, with that snow-white moustache, that waxen complexion, those lifeless hands! Lydie could not believe it. But how could she doubt that it was so when she saw, twenty paces behind the carriage, the duchess walking along the same avenue on the arm of her son, the Prince d'Olmütz, a pretty, fair-haired child, pink-cheeked and beardless, between fourteen and seventeen? She too showed a great change, in manner and bearing at all events, since the evening at the Opéra, as she presented to her dear neighbors the prince her son, whose name was Charlexis, a contraction of the names of his grandfather and father, Charles and Alexis; and the tutor, who had remained in the landau, having called to the young man, the mother availed herself of the opportunity to speak more freely. The dear child had little amusement at Grosbourg, now

that the general's illness forced the whole family to pass the summer there. By a most distressing coincidence, her own father had fallen ill at Vienna, and she was obliged to go to him at once. So she urged all their friends and neighbors to come often to Grosbourg, to enliven the invalid a little and to amuse Charlexis, who was sadly depressed between his study table and the invalid's easy-chair. Really it would be an act of charity on the part of Richard and his charming wife to take him with them on their riding or boating excursions; the dear creature loved all those forms of sport, with which his father could no longer provide him, alas! nor his tutor.

"You will take him sometimes, won't you?"

The prince walked back toward them over the mossy carpet of the road, graceful and active, holding proudly erect his small curly head, of a tawny blond as if stained with henna, and the smile upon the faces of all three said plainly:

"How charming he is!"

At some distance he called to the duchess:

"Good news, mother. When he saw Madame Richard pass the landau, the general uttered her name distinctly. Those are the first words he has put together. Master Jean called me to tell me."

Lydie Fénigan felt that her face was flooded by a red wave which made her radiant with youth and animation; and the duchess said, pressing her hands:

"You see, your presence works a miracle; I rely upon you both."

Thenceforth Charlexis was the bond between Grosbourg and Uzelles. A strange child, endowed with a refined and self-possessed courtesy, able to display deep interest in Mme. Fénigan's stories about the depredations of the dormice and the gardeners, as well as in the coquettish impulses of Mme. Lydie, whom he advised as to her dresses, her hats and her linen. At the same time, a wild, reckless creature, fond of danger and seeking it, alarming Richard by his imprudent freaks, exhibiting in them the same tranquil determination accompanied by the same glance, as of hard, polished, impenetrable stone. Was he good or bad? No one knew. "I can't understand him," said his tutor. To be sure, Jean Metzer, formerly a professor at Lausanne, which post he had resigned because of a disease of the larynx, was only a mediocre judge of human nature, having turned over the leaves of more books than human beings. He was recuperating in that country tutorship, agreeably diversified by long drives, and, after the meeting just described, by duets with Lydie, for Master Jean was a violoncellist of the first order.

Ah! Grosbourg and Uzelles heard sonatas and concertos galore. The long violoncello case crossed the river in Chuchin's boat almost as often as the little prince. In the evening, during Richard's interminable games with his mother, the notary from Draveil, Maître Fénigan's successor, Père Mérivet, the proprietor of the roadside church, and sometimes M. le Curé and a magistrate of the Corbeil tribunal, formed the usual

audience of Lydie and the tutor. The party concluded with a glass of linden-tea, Madame's favorite beverage, which fortified the guests for their walk in the dark; and in that land of modest and regular habits one would have believed oneself to be a hundred leagues from Paris.

What a difference Lydie found in the musical parties at Grosbourg! They took place in the afternoon, in one of the enormous, lofty reception rooms on the ground floor, with green and gold striped hangings, wainscoting dating from Louis XIII., like the château, with door-windows opening on an immense stoop, and a magnificent French garden, majestic, flooded with light, where the white stone of the statues, urns and balusters throbbed and quivered in the sun; a garden bounded and intersected by endless hedgerows of shrubs trimmed in the shape of candelabra. Since her husband's illness and the death of her father, which followed close upon it, the duchess passed but little time at Grosbourg, being detained at Vienna, or at Buda by the very complicated affairs of the deceased baron, and the whole château wore an air of dejection and loneliness.

As the first notes of the piano and violoncello rang through the deserted rooms, they would hear the clicking of a chair on wheels approaching over the carpets. The general, who had recovered memory, speech, his whole mental life, but seemed doomed to perpetual immobility, caused his chair to be wheeled close to the piano and sat for hours listening to Bach, Beethoven and Schumann.

Often in the middle of a piece, Lydie, looking out of the corner of her eye, would see the sick man, his nerves relaxed by the music, throw back his head, trying to restrain the great tears that overflowed his hollow eyes; and the spectacle of that dumb despair, of that pompous misery weeping silently amid those magnificent but melancholy surroundings, always caused the young woman's heart to swell with affectionate sorrow.

Neither he nor she ever mentioned or alluded to what had taken place between them at the Opéra. Sometimes, when they were alone by the piano, he would take her hand and hold it for a moment in his trembling ones; and that feeble caress, so unlike the brutal pressure which he had forced her to endure for a whole evening, filled her heart with very sweet pain. For a long time she was herself deceived, and yielding unsuspectingly to the promptings of a purely platonic sentiment, she honestly believed that, when she accompanied her husband to Grosbourg, she went there for the invalid's sake. But he was the first to see what was happening, and one day he warned her wrathfully:

"Is n't your husband jealous?"

She smiled coquettishly:

"Jealous? Of whom?"

"*Pardieu!* of the boy. Don't you see how he prowls around you, watching for your step on the gravelled walks, the rustling of your dress at the corners of the paths?"

He spoke vehemently, stumbling over his words,

that fit of jealousy having caused a slight return of his vocal paralysis. Lydie tried to laugh it off. Nonsense, he was a mere child. As if boys of seventeen ever thought about women! She was sure that he looked on her as a grand-aunt. But the duke persisted, shook his head, clenched his hands on his dead knees:

"Beware, the boy is n't making his first cartridge. He has a drawer upstairs full of letters from women. Ask your husband to make him show them to him. Ah! the monster has begun young, he has the knack of stealing hearts. Indeed, as Master Jean says, he has the *cavata*."

To have the *cavata*, in the language of violoncellists, is said of the seductive bowing which communicates to the hearer the quiver of the low notes, which acts equally upon the strings and the fibres of the heart. The little one had the *cavata*, in truth; and Lydie was unconsciously yielding to its mysterious fascination. Having been warned, she strove to defend herself; but how could she do it, with that caressing, wheedling child, who seemed so harmless, always by her side? They rowed on the river together, drew in the nets, their bare arms touching among the dripping meshes. They passed hours on the watch for game, close together, feeling their way, in the underbrush. They talked in whispers, a fine autumn rain pattered on the leaves. The boy was cold, she threw half of her great cape over him. To add to her sense of security, Richard was never far away and said of Charlexis: "He is our child," blind to the

fact that those words invariably revived his wife's secret grief, her ever-present longing for motherhood. The honest fellow had a perfect genius for such bungling, he was always the first to extol the prince's heroic grace. "He does everything well!" was another of his favorite remarks; but there was in Lydie's nature a reserve of loyalty and pride which preserved her from commonplace infidelity. It needed a surprise, one of those unforeseen emergencies in which a woman defends herself feebly, having time neither to hesitate nor to reason.

One Sunday evening, late in September, the usual auditors of the musical performance were surprised to see Master Jean appear at Uzelles without violoncello or pupil, even more taciturn than usual, and so deeply moved — Charlexis was going away, he was to enter at Stanislas next day to prepare for the examinations at Saint-Cyr. The general had suddenly so decided, and the young man, after a brief but violent discussion with his father, was coming to say adieu to his friends the Fénigans, when suddenly, within ten yards of the house, he had parted from his tutor, his heart being too full as he said, and had instructed him to express to them all his grief and his affectionate esteem. There was an explosion of regrets, of kind words in the salon. They all adored the little prince. Mme. Fénigan was angry with the general for such a decision, formed in the duchess's absence.

"She is never here!" complained Richard, in a rage, overturning the chess-board.

"And what about Master Jean," queried M. Mérivet, who had forgotten to sugar his linden-tea, "are we going to lose him too?"

In his hoarse voice the tutor replied that they had proposed to him to remain at Grosbourg as — as —"

"As chapel master?" suggested Mérivet.

"Exactly," said the poor man, blushing in his salaried distress, "and I have accepted, with the hope of seeing my dear pupil on the Sundays when he is allowed to come home, once a month."

"Only once a month?" they exclaimed in chorus. "What brutality!"

Lydie listened without speaking; and yet she was the most perturbed of all by the boy's departure; for she was certain that it was not unconnected with her, and, if the general's passionate jealousy inflamed her pride, there was cause for surprise in the sinking of the heart which this parting caused her. Did she really love the child? But, in that case, what about her flirtation with his father? While she was trying to untangle these complex sentiments, the evening passed, drearily enough. At ten o'clock, when all the guests were on their feet, preparing to go, Richard asked, as he lighted a great lantern in the hall:

"Are you coming with me to take Master Jean home, Lydie?"

It was blowing hard and was very dark. A loose shutter was beating against the wall. Why did Lydie, who would have been overjoyed any other evening to cross the Seine in that autumn

squall, say no to her husband's suggestion? Was it instinct, a presentiment, or simply the wish to have an hour alone in her bedroom to reflect upon this unexpected grief? She descended the steps with their guests, accompanied them as far as the gate on the road, then plunged into the black shade of the hedgerow, at the end of which the light of a lamp on the ground floor of the Pavilion shone like a yellow speck. Lydie walked slowly, as if in a reverie, and the wind which twisted her light dress around her mingled with it eddies of dead leaves, whose rustling caused the illusion of a pursuit under the trees, of a step behind hers. Two or three times she turned, heard her name whispered:

"Lydie — Lydie."

Putting out her hand, she walked fearlessly straight toward the bench from which came a well-known voice.

"Charley! — you!"

He had been there two hours, waiting for her, determined to say adieu to her — to her alone. How he trembled, dear little fellow! Tears drowned his lamentations, and he was choking with sobs, genuine sobs which Lydie tried to check, putting her hand or her lace hood over his mouth. At last, fearing that they would hear him at the Pavilion, she walked with him into the depths of the park, but ere long the dogs, released for the night, began their horrible uproar.

"Let us go to the *isba*," said the little prince in a low voice.

That was the former tool-house, which Richard had transformed into an armory, having the rafters of the ceiling and the fir sheathing of the walls scraped and varnished, and thereby, with the aid of rugs strewn here and there and chairs upholstered in Oriental tapestry, giving the room a sort of Russian look. Ah! if Lydie could have seen Charley's smile when they entered the isba, toward which he had been leading her craftily for five minutes! But, intent as she was upon consoling him and soothing him, how could she ever have suspected that precocious villainy? The door creaked on its hinges; the dead leaves, driven by the wind, entered with them in the darkness, and blew across the floor to the broad couch on the other side, beneath a pair of crossed swords with gleaming hilts. The dogs, no longer hearing footsteps, ceased their barking.

All the time that Charlexis remained at Stanislas their meetings took place in the isba. Perilous and infrequent those meetings were, once a month only, on the Saturday nights when he was at home. When everybody had retired at Grosbourg, the prince would cross the river, climb the wall of the Uzelles park and steal through the woods to the tool-house, where he would remain until daybreak, returning home by the same road. He risked his life every time; but Lydie, who had to leave her husband's bed and bedroom to join her lover, was exposed to even greater danger. When she returned, always panting because of the swift pace at

which she had come, her *peignoir* wet with hoar-frost or dew, she always expected to find her husband standing at the door of the Pavilion, with the terrible question on his lips: "Where have you been?" And that sense of danger was not displeasing to her, atoned in her eyes for the degrading expedients of her infidelity, the hypocrisy of which was especially revolting to her. She even went so far as to invent audacious strokes, which ended by frightening the boy.

One night when they met as usual at the isba, she insisted that Charlexis, who was invited to breakfast with them the next day, should finish the night on the couch; and in the morning, before starting for mass, she brought him one of her husband's shirts so that he might not appear with rumpled linen. It was miraculous that they were not discovered a hundred times, especially as the servants, with the exception of Rosine, Chuchin's daughter, detested that child of the gutter who had become their master's wife. What would they not have given to detect her in her misbehavior! But no. No one had seen anything, no one suspected anything. The watch-dogs, perhaps, but their evidence was unintelligible. The general and he alone, in his paralytic's chair, without a trace of espionage, had divined everything. Now, when Lydie came to Grosbourg for her duets, a significant, sorrowful glance, eyeing her from head to foot, awaited her there, and embarrassed her, especially in presence of Master Jean, whose suspicions it might arouse. In the infrequent moments

when neither the tutor nor Richard was present, the invalid, caressing her with his great trembling hands, would scold her affectionately in an undertone:

"I warned you, you know — he does n't love you, he never will love you. But it 's as I said. He has the *cavata*, he has the *cavata*."

Lydie would feign ignorance, would open her innocent eyes, but he would continue, would persist obstinately in his assertions. Of his own passion he no longer spoke except in a tone of regret for something far away and lost forever.

He said to her one day:

"Of all that I have had to sacrifice, of all my crushed ambitions, I weep only for you. And when I think that you belong to my son! — Oh!" — And another time: "When he goes to you, let him try as he will to conceal it from me, I know it by his gait, by the perfume he uses, which is yours. And it is agony, torture to me. Then I regret that my disease does n't cause me more suffering. In that case the pain would at least engross my thoughts, I should not be always thinking of this same ghastly thing, this jealousy which is driving me mad."

Early in the spring the duchess came to fetch her husband, to take him to certain waters in the Tyrol, which were said to be a sovereign remedy for his disease. The invalid was to pass twice the usual length of time there, and, seizing upon the necessity of hard work for the examinations as a pretext for gratifying his jealousy, he

determined that Charlexis should pass the whole time at Stanislas without leave of absence, notwithstanding Richard's offer to take the young man in at Uzelles for his vacation. Charlexis submitted without a murmur. As he had long been planning a yachting tour around the world, he had recourse to his mother's former steward to procure the necessary funds for his escapade. And as he had no idea of travelling alone, a few letters, more or less subtle in character, in which he played deftly upon one chord after another of that feminine organ with all of whose vibrations he was familiar, were all that was needed to persuade Lydie. He unrolled before the orphan's nomadic, gypsy instincts, the panorama of the adventures of a long sea-voyage, opened to her unfamiliar skies and horizons; and to flatter her vanity as a child of hazard, the romance which she invented for herself on the foundation of her mysterious origin, he wrote to her: "Does not your aristocratic blood rebel in that environment of addle-pated bourgeoisie and vulgar greed?" In spite of everything Lydie was distrustful of him, of his extreme youth; she imagined the mother's despair, the general's pallid, heart-broken smile; at the last a most trivial incident turned the scale.

"Who gave you this?" she asked her maid, when Rosine slipped the prince's first letter into her hand.

The servant blushed: "Monsieur Alexandre — for Madame — Madame only."

After that she felt that she was at the mercy of

the servants. The ex-flunkey, when he met her, assumed the knowing air of an accomplice; she found that she had no choice but to shut her eyes to his relations with Rosine, since they both knew her secret. One day or another, through carelessness or malevolence, the crash would come; as well not wait for it. She wrote to her lover: "Whenever you choose." His answer: "Tomorrow morning, five o'clock, at the gate into the woods."

The last day at Uzelles was like every other. In the evening, chess and music; at precisely ten o'clock the return to the Pavilion, where, while Richard was going to bed, she scrawled in her dressing-room a few lines to her mother-in-law, declaring that she was going away penniless, without box or trunk, with just the clothes that she wore. — "You took me with nothing; I go with nothing. I was in prison; I am escaping." — She tossed to Rosine the peignoir that she took off, almost new, of blue India silk and lace, to the vast amazement of the servant.

"Madame means to give it to me?"

"Yes, keep it."

Then she went to bed, perfectly calm, and slept until daybreak, until her husband started out for his fishing; and at precisely five o'clock she reached the gate at the farthest extremity of the park, which she found wide open, and in front of it — not the carriage she expected — but a market-gardener's wagon on which the gardeners were loading baskets of fruit and vegetables. Oh! the dormice!

Lydie's appearance caused a *coup de théâtre.* The wagon disappeared in the woods, the gardeners through the park; only one basket remained, lying open on the grass against the gate. How the fugitive would have laughed had the moment been a less dramatic one! But she was hurrying toward a victoria, recognizing the wheels and livery half concealed under a clump of trees, when an old vagabond rose from the ditch, directly in front of her. In that ragged, begrimed creature, with matted beard, she recognized Père Georges, the terror of her youth, and bethought herself to hand him the letter for her mother-in-law: "Take this to the house."

When the letter was in his fingers he did not stir, but stood with his head on one side, blocking the passage of that lovely creature, rosy-cheeked in the rosy flush of morning, and gazing at her with his blinking eyes. She thought that he was waiting to be paid for the errand. "I have no money; they will pay you there." —But he seemed not to understand, and stood like a statue before her, his lips moving with words that did not come forth. And not until the young woman, pushing him aside with a sudden movement of her arm, had disappeared around a bend in the road, did he begin to walk in the opposite direction, with a hoarse rattle, an inarticulate groan far down in his throat.

IV.

In front of the Pavilion, at the corner of the Corbeil road and a country lane running down to the Seine between the vineyards, a stone fountain well known to wagoners, with its tin cup hanging by a chain, stood against the park wall. The first sound that Richard noticed, when he emerged from a lethargy of which he could not estimate the duration, was the tinkling of that cup as some wayfarer dropped it after drinking from it. He smiled at that noise which had been familiar to him from childhood, opened his eyes, and from his bed, in the half-light of the room, the curtains being drawn aside, he saw reflected on the white ceiling as on the sheet of a magic lantern, the microscopic shadow of a wayfarer resuming his pack after a halt at the fountain on the corner.

"Oh! the road!" he exclaimed aloud, happy in that familiar sight. But at the same moment the memory of his disaster returned. He was cold, he was afraid, and obeying a childish impulse he closed his eyes, as if to return to oblivion, forgetfulness of everything; but his closed eyes saw, his ears buried under the sheets heard, and always the same horrible thing, his mother at the end of the hedge-row calling to him:

"Your wife has gone!"

By a strange anomaly, in that extremely mild and simple-hearted creature who was nevertheless guided wholly by instinct, the jealousy from which he was destined to suffer later, and with such intensity as to serve as a model for a study of that passion, did not make its claws and its cruel, sharp, chimera's beak felt at once. When he knew with whom his wife had gone — Charley, his sailor-boy, as the little fellow called himself, the friend who was nearest to his heart — the blow was certainly a severe one; a wound below the belt, tricky, dealt from below, but so entirely unexpected that that feature kept down his suffering at first. "He — it is he!" — A furtive flush stole over his pale cheeks, a mist veiled his honest, dog-like eyes, and that was all. The pangs of jealousy came later, seized him on the rebound, and then were inflamed to madness. For the moment everything was swallowed up in the great black hole yawning at his feet, over which he leaned without understanding. Gone — why? What had he done to her? Did she not love him, when he loved her so dearly?

Seated at his window, looking out upon that familiar scene in which everything reminded him of Lydie, his only thought during his convalescence was this: "What has happened?" He would have liked to read the letter she wrote when she went away; but his mother kept that letter from him, — another day, later, when he was cured. There were some things in it which would hurt

him too much, which might bring on another attack. She would be only too well pleased, the hussy!

In reality, Lydie's letter accused her mother-in-law so explicitly, with such an accent of rebellion and sincerity, that she recoiled at the thought of her son's despair and anger, knowing that he was as much in love after eight years of married life as on the first day. And the constancy of that love was what alarmed the good woman more than aught else. In her mind, as in the minds of many other Frenchwomen in whom the mother overshadows the wife and who pour out upon the child the repressed affection which the husband cannot or does not care to win, passion was nothing more than a novelist's or playwright's accessory, and life *à deux* had been simply a monotonous partnership. How could she understand the vehemence of that desire which she read in her son's eyes, as uncontrollable after the lapse of years as in the days when his scorching tears splashed the window-panes of the isba?

"Really I don't understand you men," she said as she guided his steps and supported him in his first walk in the park, one bright August afternoon. "You can love and despise at the same time. So you are still thinking about that strumpet who deceived you, who is living with another man and making you the laughing-stock of the province."

The mother felt the arm that was resting on hers tremble, but she continued in a harsh voice, with the pitiless glance of an operating surgeon:

"Their whole story is known, understand that. Their assignations were on our premises. He came over the wall at night."

"Let us go in, mamma; I am tired," murmured Richard, pushing open the door of the little wooden house. As he sank upon the couch with the whole weight of his discouragement, the worn-out springs creaked, and the same thought brought a flush to the cheeks of the mother and son.

"For your pride's sake, my dear child, for the honor of your name, think no more of that woman; promise me."

She moved a cushion in order to sit beside him; several hairpins that had fallen there and been overlooked slipped through her fingers. She picked them up and threw them out-of-doors with a gesture of disgust. Then followed an embarrassed silence, during which a swallow flew in through the open window, grazed the beams with a "frrt" as of a fan being opened, and flew out again, like a woman's whim.

"Promise me," the mother repeated, deeply moved.

"Well! yes, I promise," Richard replied, "but on one condition — I insist upon knowing, I insist upon your telling me where they are."

She was afraid that she had borne too hard on the chord of pride and anger.

"You want to know where they are? Why? What do you mean to do?"

"Nothing; mere curiosity."

"But I don't know, I assure you."

"Very good. The Grosbourg people have returned; I can get an answer there."

Mme. Fénigan, dreading a scandal, promised to go herself to the d'Alcantaras in quest of news; it would only give her a sick headache, which she had whenever she put on a hat.

Two days later, alighting from her carriage in front of the spacious stoop of the Château of Grosbourg, she found the duchess engaged in a very secret and animated conversation with M. Alexandre, whose ironically obsequious salutation sent a cold chill to the visitor's heart.

"I will see you again, Alexandre," said the duchess, as she led Mme. Fénigan into a small corner salon, with old-fashioned silk hangings. "To what do we owe the honor of this visit, Madame la Notaresse?" she said in a tone of hypocritical and arrogant benevolence. The notaress, whom the title so well described, seemed to be suffocated by that greeting, with all the terrible things that were still unsaid between them.

"My son Richard nearly died, Madame."

"Ah! indeed — so bad as that. I did not know —"

"What! you did n't know that my poor child —"

"*Mon Dieu!* Madame, there are subjects of such delicacy —"

She passed a phial of smelling salts under her nose, Hebraic in its curved outline.

"It is a subject that touches you nearly, however," muttered Mme. Fénigan. And she added abruptly, as her maternal wrath exploded:

"Ah! Madame la Duchesse, it's a great pity that my son ever met yours."

The little head with the lemon-colored hair drew itself up with a wicked smile:

"You certainly do not mean to accuse Charlexis of kidnapping your daughter-in-law? My son is barely eighteen; he was still in school."

A door was opened, disclosing against the long line of reception-rooms the melancholy, wrinkled face of the general-duke, leaning painfully on the arm of his chair to greet Mme. Fénigan with these insolent words:

"I will add, dear Madame, that our dear innocent, when he departed, borrowed a hundred thousand francs, which will cost us fully twice that amount, whereas his Danaë boasts of having fled with nothing but the one chemise she had on her back."

While he was speaking, an old-fashioned pier-glass above the mantel in the small salon reflected the trembling of his long moustache, which he twisted with a fiendish smile, and the despairing gestures which Master Jean made with the bow of his violoncello, from his station behind the great easy-chair. Mme. Fénigan had risen, with great dignity, and said as she took her leave:

"Request your son not to come in my son's path."

The general was startled, but the duchess reassured him: "Nonsense! — with one in Seine-et-Oise and the other on his way to the Indies, they are not in much danger of meeting."

However, as soon as Mme. Fénigan was in her carriage and the carriage at the end of the avenue, they summoned M. Alexandre.

"General?"

"Just have an eye on this Richard, do you understand? If he leaves the neighborhood, follow on his heels and keep us informed."

The duchess added:

"As for my son's expenses, whatever he asks for, come directly to me."

The ex-steward bowed to the ground and went away from Grosbourg, a dandified death's-head.

Meanwhile Richard, his head drawn down between his broad shoulders, was striding furiously up and down the salon, at Uzelles, listening to Mme. Fénigan, who sat crushed with indignation in the depths of a capacious armchair, her hat with its long strings on her knee. He listened to her patiently to the end, with clenched teeth; at last, halting in front of his mother, he lifted her, held her against his heart, in an outburst of affection extremely rare in that reserved creature, and exclaimed:

"It is all over, now. You are right; that woman is unworthy; let her go where she pleases, we will never mention her name again."

He said it in the sincerity of his indignation, horrified at the thought that Lydie had carried off, had seduced a school-boy. For the first time he realized the grotesqueness as well as the horror of the episode, surprised to find that he had had so long beside him, without knowing it, a diseased woman,

a hysterical subject and calling his mother to witness that it was so; and the mother agreed to and emphasized what he said, overjoyed to have won back her former place in his heart.

"It's our fault, you see, my son. We went to the Foundling Hospital for her. In that way one avoids the vexations of a family; but the wife comes to you without antecedents or sponsors, enveloped in mystery, in obscurity, subject to all possible hereditary drawbacks. This girl claimed to be of noble blood. They put that into her head at the convent. At all events her nobility was well mixed with depravity in her veins. Kiss me, and let us think no more about her."

He tried to avoid thinking of her, exhausting his body by fatigue, so that he dropped asleep every evening with clenched fists. Doubtless, if he had married a domestic woman like his mother, devoted to her orchard, her cupboards, her linen and her preserves, Richard would have found distraction for his suffering in outdoor life. But Lydie, having no child, no house to look after, accompanied her husband everywhere, hunted and fished at his side, and when he tried to shun reminders of her, he found them wherever he went, as living and vivid as the shadow of his vanished happiness.

His first cast of the net after his wife's departure was between Ris and Juvisy, a few yards from the shore. The water, which is very calm in that spot, showed him the reversed image of a bargemen's inn, a former posting station, standing alone

on the edge of the towing-path, with its broad thatched roof and its long, small-paned windows.

"Am I too far in among the weeds!" asked Chuchin, who held the oars, amazed at his employer's immobility. Richard did not reply; he was living over a scene of their married life, enacted at that same spot, the river foaming in a pouring rain, the sky black as ink, the boat full of water, Lydie shrieking and laughing in the downpour, one of her little shoes lost, drowned in landing; and then the common-room at the inn, long and dark, where candles stuck in empty bottles shone on the fierce faces of bargemen, sandhaulers and shepherds, who also had been taken unawares by the shower and were drying their great woollen cloaks before the fire of small sticks at which Lydie, drenched to the skin, was warming herself, twisting up her hair, amused by those lustful eyes, aflame with satyr-like desire and kept at a distance by the stout frame and brawny fists of her companion.

"The water is too clear here, old Chuchin, row up above the bridge," said Richard in an altered voice. And beneath the keeper's vigorous stroke the mirror which reflected the old inn was broken into twenty pieces which sank to the bottom of the river with the memories it evoked. The boat stopped at Île des Moineaux, a spot marvellously well adapted for casting the net, but the master's hand had lost its cunning that day.

At one of its points the little island is indented by a long crescent-shaped inlet, where, over a bottom of fine sand, a transparent pool sleeps in the

shadow of two willows with tufted foliage, which bend and meet overhead. Lydie called that nook her bath. With Richard's boat across the entrance with its sail set, and the willows falling like curtains on either side, she would take her lesson in swimming; and when she removed her clothes, when she came out of the water, what wild laughter and little shrieks of alarm at the slightest breath upon her bare pink skin from a willow branch or the wings of a frightened insect! The image of that lovely dripping flesh, streaked with cold and with light, with shivers and with sunbeams, the sudden recurrence of the flavor of that luscious fruit into which he had never dared but once to bite to his heart's desire, in a word the heartbreaking regret that filled his eyes with tears, for vanished joys, for hours that were dead and gone, was the only result of his three or four casts of the net during his long halt at Île des Moineaux.

"It's a strange thing," said Rosine Chuchin's father that evening in the kitchen, "that for all his sad face, Monsieur Richard never once stopped singing all the time he was fishing."

In truth, while he was absorbed in contemplation of his single, cherished souvenir, an air by Pergolèse mechanically recurred to his mind, an air which Master Jean and Lydie used to play, and of which he sang the bass, accompanying with his "poum-poum" the divine melody which rang in his brain and swelled his heart to bursting.

In the days that followed he was beset by the same image. In all the nooks and windings of

the river, no matter what the hour, in the morning fogs so dense that he had nothing to guide his course save the plashing of the water against the piles of the bridges, or at night, when the lights of a barge glided mysteriously along close to the river bank; on the Yères and on the Orge, those pretty little affluents of the Seine, lined by green slopes, by clumps of trees and brilliant flower-gardens, by dove-cotes, by laundries, by ancient abbeys transformed into mills, always and everywhere the same amorous image haunted him. He saw her under his oar, slender and cool as a water-plant, and with its greenish-white tint, impervious to sun and wind.

The forest skirted the river. Richard plunged into the forest to escape the haunting visions of the water. But in the underbrush, among the thickets of young trees, at the intersection of the grass-grown roads where all the sign-posts were familiar to them, the vision pursued him. Always Lydie; and when it was not Lydie, chance meetings, incidents, to remind him of his misfortune. One evening, on returning from a long walk, as he passed the Hermitage, rough but kindly voices called to him.

"Hallo! Monsieur Richard."

Sautecœur, alias the Indian, an old giant of a woodsman suspected of poaching, was celebrating the marriage of his son, a floor-walker in Paris, to a clerk in the same shop. In the centre of the grass-grown, untidy courtyard of the former cloister a long table was spread, around which were

gathered keepers in the Grosbourg livery, with their sunburned wives dressed in brilliant-hued holiday clothes, the farmer of Uzelles and his family, the two musicians who furnished music for the wedding, and M. Alexandre, very *chic*, with his varnished boots and light trousers, staring through his monocle at the bride, an adorably ugly creature, dressed and hair-dressed in the latest style. Richard must go in and sit down for a moment. The dinner was nearing its close; a few more glasses of white wine were drunk to the health of the bride and groom. After which, at a signal given on the cornet, they took their places for a quadrille in the last rays of the setting sun. Richard and the Indian, with their elbows on the table, talked as they watched the dancers.

"As to her being a flirt, Monsieur Richard, I think the child's a good deal of a flirt," said the keeper, following his daughter-in-law's white wreath with his narrow eyes like a bulky pachyderm's. "And so the boy don't care about her going back to the shop, especially as her lungs are a little weak. They 're going to stay at the Hermitage a season or two. He will pass the day at his work in Paris and I 'll keep an eye on his wife. I did n't have any luck with my own wife in my day, but I promise you this one shall walk straight."

"I don't doubt it," said Richard with a constrained smile, thinking to himself that he should have entrusted the Indian with the surveillance of his family.

Darkness was descending upon the woods when

he left the Hermitage; the birds were no longer singing; only the wedding cornet sent forth its shrill rhythmical notes, but that was not the music which Richard heard and which he accompanied with his rumbling bass, with his heart-rending "poum-poum," strewn along the dark paths.

In his discouragement he ceased to go out. There was a room called the study on the ground floor of the Pavilion, near the laundry. Richard, who had slept in his bachelor chamber near his mother's at the Château since his wife's flight, still used that abandoned room to take his siesta in the great leather-covered chair, or to settle a contractor's account at the old notary's cylindrical desk. Thenceforth he remained there much of the time. He watched the road from the window as in his childhood, amused himself by recognizing old acquaintances there, the roadmender's barrow, the little hunchbacked shoe-peddler, artless figures on what might be likened to the board of a game of "goose," over which Lydie's face seemed to be leaning beside his. He remembered her fear of the cattle on the day before market-day, and also of the Foucart tumbril on which they used to carry persons found drowned. There is the mysterious vehicle now coming slowly up from the Seine; it is bringing old Mérivet's valet-de-chambre, who has just been taken from the grass on the shore, where he was accidentally drowned day before yesterday. He was sacristan of the Little Parish Church; so his poor master is

following his body, weeping and more bent and shrunken than usual.

Ah! there is Père Georges, with his long stick and a piece of bread under his arm. Surely to-day is not the pauper's day; but the old vagabond has not left Uzelles for some time past. He seems to be watching, waiting. He is constantly found wandering about the Château or lying against one of the gates, sometimes on the road, sometimes in the forest. "He is never sober now!" says Chuchin enviously; and the girls in the kitchen, when the old tramp puts his man-dog's muzzle and his watery eyes between the bars of their basement window, call out to him with a laugh: "Have you got a pain in your heart, Père Georges?"

It is a pitiful sight, on this hot, glaring day, to see that poor, human worm drag himself along the high road, clinging to the trees or the walls. What was his origin? Has that creature a country? What language, what patois does that toothless mouth murder? And how happens he to be in that corner of Seine-et-Oise, the old beggar, as lost and unknown and far-away as if he were straying about in the wilds of Central Africa?

Now he approaches the fountain, trying to reach the cup and hold it under the stream of clear water. His hands tremble, his feet slip, his hat, an old rag without shape or color, falls beside the overturned cup, which makes the young farmer's wife standing opposite, watching her poultry yard, her hands folded over an enormous stomach, laugh till the tears roll down her cheeks. At last the

poor wretch after painful efforts succeeds in drinking from the spout itself; and two tiny streams of water trickle down from his beard, while the sun scorches his bald, red skull, marked with great blue veins. And Richard recalled what Lydie once said to him, that she had never seen a wayfarer stop at night at that crossroad to drink, and stand for a moment hesitating, looking at the ground — no, that she had never seen that uncertainty born of misery and loneliness, without thinking that the poor wanderer had once been a little baby, rocked and petted by a fond mother, who perhaps, as she watched him in his sleep, dreamed of a most brilliant future for him. How could the woman who spoke so kindly, with such sincere compassion, inflict such injury upon her husband? So he was of less consequence to her than an old pauper?

Now that he has quenched his thirst, Père Georges lies down by the fountain, heavily, bit by bit, as if he were throwing his limbs on the ground one after another. He takes his bread from under his threadbare, ragged cloak, places it on a stone by his side, then, closing his eyes, but only half way, for he has to defend his crust against the flies and a swarm of filthy vermin opposed to his taking rest, he falls asleep with one hand on his breast, the other on his hard-wood staff.

But Richard does not sleep. The pleasant siestas of the old days are a thing of the past. He gazes at the other side of the glaring, scorching road, watching, listening to the heavy sleep of that

wretched creature for whom he feels something like affection because he was Lydie's pauper, because he was the last person to whom she spoke, because it was that cracked and distorted hand into which she put the farewell note which Mme. Fénigan never dared show to her son. And suddenly he thinks that perhaps his wife's little desk in their bedroom upstairs contains other letters as interesting as that one. How is it that he has never before been tempted to look there?

He goes to Rosine to ask her for the key, sees M. Alexandre's figure climbing through the laundry window looking on the park, runs hastily up the little wooden staircase hung with Genoese canvas covered with large flowers, and stands before a dainty little piece of old-fashioned marquetry of which he bursts the lock, being suddenly intoxicated by the odor of iris in sachet bags, which recalls the absent one even more strongly than the melodies of Pergolèse or Beethoven. With his great fingers Richard ferrets and fumbles feverishly. He has already found letters from his mother and himself, written when he was paying court to the orphan, a few notes from Sister Martha during a short visit to Dublin; then, very carefully preserved, the two bills for their supper and their night's lodging the night of the Opéra. Poor Lydie! she must have lacked opportunities for enjoyment.

Now he finds a large envelope containing a miniature on ivory in a case, and three letters in a fine feline handwriting which he recognizes as the

"Now he finds three letters in a fine feline handwriting."

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handwriting of Charlexis. At the first lines he starts, his cheeks flush purple at the prince's infernal manœuvring to persuade Lydie to fly, by dilating upon the hateful monotony of her existence between the vulgar Poum-poum and Madame Dormouse, the apple-gatherer; those are the terms in which he refers to Richard and his mother. Ah! the little monster, nothing escapes him, neither hobbies nor tedious repetitions of the same story; and what a faculty he has for appealing to the young woman's vanity, her pretensions to noble birth, her feverish longing for travel and adventure! how well he knows how to make her think that she is stifling on that little stretch of the Seine between two locks! And they accuse Lydie of having imposed upon his eighteen years! Why that young prince is a hundred years old; and he has the experience of an old ballet-dancer and a wicked priest. No, she did not seduce him and carry him off; these letters prove that.

But who, pray, is this superb, lusty baby, lying all naked on a flowered carpet, in this tiny gold frame? Whose child is it? Theirs, perhaps. But when? Where? How? She has never left the house. And the poor husband, whose disappointed paternity was a constant source of regret, searchingly questions those miniature features, those curly golden locks, the stone-cold eyes of him whom he supposes to be the little monster's natural child. But no, it is the little monster himself. That portrait of Charlexis at the age of two was a whim of the general's — a way of saying to the

ladies who went into ecstasies over the lovely nude little creature: "That is the kind I make;" while the prince, offering his mistress that counterfeit presentiment of his infancy, seems to imply: "That is how I am made." In the bottom of the case, under the portrait, a more familiar, more ardent letter than the others, gives these explanations. As he runs through this letter, Richard suddenly turns pale, his hand trembles nervously and he feels a horrible contraction in the pit of his stomach. His eyes grow dim, blinded by flashes within, so that they can no longer see. The poison, the poison of jealousy — he has never before felt that horrible burning sensation. Lydie gone away, lost to him, he has thought of nothing beyond that; but now he thinks of the other, of the man who has stolen her from him, of their transports, their caresses. And the poor jealous wretch reads on. He would like not to do it, every word rends him, burns him; but he must; it is like a delicious poison which a malignant fever forces him to drink and drink.

To persuade Lydie to fly with him, the lover complains in ardent phrases that their nights in the isba are too dark; he is weary of loving in the darkness, in fear and trembling, with the dogs sniffing under the door. Doubtless there is attraction in it, the stimulant of danger. Oh! their kiss yesterday morning on the stoop at Grosbourg, lip to lip, so sweet and so long that for five minutes they both were dazed and quivering, their knees trembling under them. But their first night in the

state-room on the yacht will be much sweeter. A free, sleepless night, without fear or shame; kisses and light. It will be as in the Malaga ballad, in which the fair Catholic whispers on her lover's lips: "Put out the light, oh! put out the light — I prefer not to know the sin of the eyes." Afterward, she says aloud, in the ecstasy of pleasure: "Light the lamp, my dear, light the lamp. The sin of the eyes, too; I want to commit that with all the rest."

The poor devil has risen, is striding furiously back and forth, clenching his hands which itch to do murder. Oh! the ghastly thing he sees, the horrors with which his eyes are filled, to which he can never again close them! "Ah! the loathsome little prince, ah! the thief! Where has he taken her? where has he hidden her? If I could find out, if I could have them here, and come down upon them — like this, yes, like this!" And with the heel of his boot he shatters, crushes the ivory miniature, fancying that he is bruising the naked flesh, crushing out the life. — But the poison has been drunk, it has mingled with his blood and will give him no respite henceforth.

In the salon that evening, Mme. Fénigan watched her son with an air of assurance and satisfaction, as they arranged the chessmen in the peaceful circle of light cast by the shaded lamp. "Tell me, are n't we comfortable and happy together?"

Ah! if she but suspected what he saw, the scenes that he imagined!

V.

THE mass was at an end. The gate and the door were thrown open, revealing against the sombre background of the church, still darkened by the bright light without, the tapers going out one after another, and M. Mérivet standing in the vestibule, freshly shaven, his white hair falling in curls over his high satin cravat, the red ribbon of the order of the Pope in the buttonhole of his frockcoat, bowing to his guests as they went out, escorting persons of note as far as the road, thanking them for the great honor with animated, old-fashioned courtesy. "Really, I am very grateful to you — we had a very good attendance this morning, but there would have been more of us had it not been for the feast of the patron saint at Draveil and some service or other at the orphanage at Soisy, which detracts from our attendance. Adieu until Sunday — do not fail — until Sunday."

The faithful worshippers at the Little Parish Church, mostly neighbors, went their respective ways, diffusing for some moments along the highway an odor of consecrated bread, the creaking of new boots and rustling of silk dresses. Barbe, the very ancient cook, who since the valet's death had taken his place as sacristan, brought M. Mérivet

the key of the main door. "Yes, Monsieur, everything is shut and the lights out, except in the sacristy, where Monsieur le Vicaire is still sitting. He told me not to wait for him, that he would go out through the close."

The close was a bit of land adjoining the chapel, where some blocks of stone left over when the church was built still lay among the grass and the enormous poppies, all in full bloom. From the road one would have said it was a village cemetery.

"Abbé Cérès is not ill, is he?" inquired M. Mérivet, to whom the pastor of his little church was as dear as the church itself. But Barbe reassured him. M. le Vicaire had asked for a needle and some black thread, doubtless to mend his worn, shiny old cassock.

"If Monsieur should buy him another one, it would be none too soon."

"You are right, Barbe; we will buy him a new cassock. But go quickly to your breakfast."

The old woman crossed the road, now deserted, and magnified like all the surrounding country by the silence and repose of the Sabbath; she disappeared through a little gate in the opposite wall, leaving her master sitting in the sunlight on one of the great white stones in the close. M. Mérivet was waiting for the vicar to come out and was trying to think of some way to induce him to accept a fine new cassock which should not be sold again immediately for the benefit of the poor, when he heard footsteps coming along the road accom-

panied by the humming of a bass voice. He loved above all things to have a passer-by, a stranger, stop to read the inscription on his church: *Napoléon Mérivet, Chevalier of the Order of Saint-Grégoire le Grand.* He raised his head, enjoying in anticipation his vainglorious delight, and was a little disappointed at the appearance of Richard Fénigan, whom he had not seen since the interruption of the musical evenings by Lydie's departure. He called him with an affectionate gesture, made him sit down beside him, and after bestowing a searching gaze upon him said:

"Why did n't you come earlier? Don't you propose ever to enter my little church? It would do you good, none the less."

Richard, thin and hollow-cheeked, with long horizontal wrinkles marking his brow like the lines on music-paper, tried to invent an excuse for making his escape at once, to avoid the reproaches of that old maniac, the landlord of the religion so to speak; but the warmth of the stone, the soothing odor of the poppies, the attractive and captivating kindliness of the old man chained him to the spot.

"You are much younger than I," said the good man, patting his hands gently; "but two people are very nearly the same age when they meet with the same misfortune. I have known the trouble from which you are suffering; I have passed through it as you are doing, miserable enough to die, miserable enough to kill — yes, I mean it, to kill. It is amusing, is n't it? to think of Père Mérivet,

the little old man who is always so courteous and calm. It needed nothing less than that — an attack of frantic pride — to make of him the most cowardly of assassins, for there is no coward so great as a husband who kills his wife with the authority of the law."

Richard hung his head without replying. To think that he, who for a week had thought of nothing but murder and revenge and was that moment returning from the post, where he had been in the hope of finding there, by some chance, by looking over the mail left to be called for, some tell-tale handwriting— to think that he should lay himself open to such confidences! So the sinister thoughts which a feverish brain revolves as it passes along the highroad are visible; but why did old Mérivet, usually so silent about his own affairs, feel impelled to tell him his story?

"That story, my dear boy, resembles yours; but I was sixteen years older than my wife. I was small, not handsome and in business up to my neck, dealing in alfa-grass, which compelled me to make frequent trips to Algeria; I had but one thing in my favor, I played the violin and not very badly. My Irène, who was born at Blidah, had a golden complexion, long, coaxing eyes and the sweetest manners. Although she knew but little about music, she loved it as you do, instinctively, with her nerves. The soft caressing touch of the notes made her quiver all over; I was, as I tell you, quite an accomplished performer. You are surprised that you never heard me in your Sunday

concerts; the truth is that, since Irène's death, I have never cared to play.

"Our second year of married life gave us a child, which did not live. My wife was bitterly disappointed, especially as we were warned that she could not hope to become a mother again. It was at that time that I bought this place at Uzelles to divert her mind, to enable her to live in the open air; she was pleased, or pretended to be pleased to gratify me. She took such zealous interest in everything! Unluckily a famous painter came to live in the neighborhood. Irène loved celebrities; I shared with her that characteristic Parisian foible, pride in having a famous man at one's table. Being made welcome at our house, the painter came often. He was a handsome fellow with theatrical manners, beard trimmed to a point, hair *à la* Rubens, and underneath his pretentious ways, a most vivid imagination and a faculty of highly-colored and captivating speech. All the time that he was there my wife leaned toward him drinking in his words; and I made my violin sing to no purpose, for she listened to his voice and followed it, in spite of Mendelssohn and Chopin. I was deeply pained by that, as I was to see her — always bored and silent when we were alone — become animated, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, simply on hearing that man's step at our door. I reproached her for it sometimes, laughingly, but my laughter jarred as much as hers when she answered with an artless, surprised air: 'Do you think so? Why, no, I assure you.'

Soon I had only this one thought in my head: 'She loves him, she loves him.' At night, as I lay beside her, I dreamed that I was very tall and strong, comelier than the other; and often, instead of sleeping, I watched her sleep, listened to the passionate outcries with which I imagined that her lips were swollen, although nothing had taken place between them. At other times I had a frantic longing to wake her abruptly: 'Love me, love me, or I'll kill you.' At last, feeling that she was getting a little farther away from my heart every day, it occurred to me to apply to the man with whom she was in love. I don't know why it was that I associated in my mind that artist's name with grandeur of soul, generosity, superior understanding. And so one day, I said to that man very quietly: 'Hark ye — I am not strong enough. I feel that she is slipping away from me and going toward you involuntarily. For you, it is nothing but an *amourette*, a momentary gratification. For me, it is my whole life. Do not take her away from me, I implore you — leave her to me and go away.'

"The man replied: 'Very well, I will go.' He did go the next day, but he took her with him.

"You know something of what I suffered; and yet I was alone, I had no heart in which to pour out my grief, no mother to keep me from doing foolish things. I did them all. At first I determined to follow them, having made up my mind to kill them both; they were in Switzerland, at Gersau on the Lake of Lucerne. How melancholy

that lake seemed to me, darkened by the mountains reflected in it, tinged with gloom and mourning, on the evening when I landed there, within two steps of the only hotel. My wife and her lover had just gone to the Kursaal. I took a room opposite theirs; I heard them return with the other guests of the hotel. He talked very loud in the hall, in his wheedling, musical voice; but he had another voice with which I was not familiar, his home voice, sharp and stern, which soon reached my ears indistinctly through their closed door. I kept mine ajar part of the night, and stood there, revolver in hand, ready to jump. One absurd circumstance restrained me, my unfamiliarity with firearms, especially with that one, which I had bought all loaded on the morning I left home, and which I feared that I might use awkwardly. Yet it seems to me that at the slightest sound of doubtful meaning, at the slightest suggestion of a caress, I should have rushed upon them like a wild beast. But what I heard bore little resemblance to caresses. He was scolding her, angrily and sneeringly; she, in a low, grief-stricken voice, broken by weeping, humbling herself and imploring pardon. I learned later that he was making a scene apropos of a musician at the Kursaal whom she had favored with too many glances, for he too was jealous, jealous and cruel, to the point of striking her, and in their quarrels his most serious grievance against her, that with which he reproached her most bitterly was her betrayal of her husband. As I listened to that weak, monotonous complain-

ing of a being whom I loved so dearly, whom I felt to be suffering so near me, the tears rolled down my cheeks, called forth by her tears, and, calling myself all the while a coward and a fool, I threw myself on my bed with sobs and cries which in my shame I stifled in my pillow. Ah! how dark it is in our poor souls when prayer does not illumine them! And in those days I did not know how to pray.

"At daybreak Irène's lover went out alone with his box and his easel. He was going to paint on the mountain. My wife must be asleep; the room was perfectly silent. I had only to turn the knob, and, without knowing how I had entered or why, as assassin or as husband, to embrace her or to kill her, I found myself beside her. The little noise that I made partially awakened her, and she moved; but her heavy morning sleep, following a wretched night, seized her again at once and she breathed long and deep. She had evidently slept alone, he on the couch, on which were bed-clothes tossed about in disorder, adding to the confusion of that small room, filled with trunks and clothes, and lighted by the twofold morning light of the sky and the lake near at hand. What profound emotion seized me as I saw my beloved on that cheap hotel bed, in the same coquettish pose that I had so often admired, one arm bent under her head, the other thrown carelessly on the sheet, bare and dazzlingly white. I honestly thought that I was going to strangle her, to prevent her from living longer with that man; but, as I leaned

over her, blinded by that savage impulse, her whole frame was shaken by one of those long half-sobs which a child gives who has been scolded and has fallen asleep in his misery. Then I noticed that her eyes were red, her eyelids swollen with the marks of tears, and I felt a great wave of compassion for her, all my wrath vanished in face of such irresponsibility and weakness. Oh! the great dealer in phrases talks about it very cavalierly, and with a fine stage gesture bids us: 'Kill her!' But one must have the murderer's instinct, a cowardly heart and an executioner's hands. I rushed to the door without looking around; an hour later I had gone.

"Returning to Paris, finding that I could not turn my attention to business again, I took refuge here, and was so lonely and miserable that I used my revolver at last, against myself. This little round hole which I made in my head"—old Mérivet raised his white hair and showed the scar —"this bullet-scratch kept me for two months neither dead nor alive, in a dazed condition. When my brain began to live again, I found at my side a noble man, a saint who nursed my soul; and when my soul was cured, in obedience to the law of charity and forgiveness my arms were reopened to her whom I still loved, and whose only wish was to return to me. Poor dear, what a return! Sadly changed, wasted, with the same red flush on her cheek-bones that we see on beech-leaves that have been attacked by caterpillars, her escape from her six months of free love was like a discharge

from a hospital. I hoped that this pretty, verdant spot, so pleasantly placed between the river and the woods, would restore her strength. But she continued to droop, even after a winter passed in her own country, in the centre of an orange grove near Blidah. Sometimes, with a heart-broken smile in her lovely eyes, which filled a greater space in her face every day, she would say to me: 'I love you, I am happy, and I am going away. What a fate!'

"For my part, I had confidence in my passion, in her youth. Suddenly life came back, at all events the appearance and symptoms of life. Herscher's novels performed that miracle. One whole summer, her last summer, she passed in our garden, which you see on the other side of the road, shivering in the bright sunshine, in a sort of wicker sentry-box, reading and re-reading the novelist's charming love-stories; there was one, the *Brodeuse d'Or*, which she preferred to all the others because of the attractive figure of Yamina, whose costume she amused herself by copying and wearing, the jacket of spangled velvet, and the head-dress of gold sequins on her long locks.

"'What would the author say if he should see me as Yamina?' she often asked me. 'Do I look like her?'—And I, unthinkingly, answered: 'Yes, indeed,' reflecting sadly that, if the novelist had been there, he would have seen as I saw, just above the chair of his coquettish Yamina with her beautiful fever-bright eyes, the linen hanging out to dry over the balcony rail of her room, the linen from

her bed, pillow, and mattress, drenched with the sweat of her sleepless nights. However, seeking to please her, to pet her to the end, I asked her one day if it would give her any pleasure to see Herscher, if she wished me to write him to come. My love still endured, but my jealous pride was thoroughly cured, as you see; all such sentiments are so petty in face of death! Irène, profoundly moved, said nothing; she replied only by throwing me a kiss with the tips of her fingers, and sobbing.

"I lost her some time after, in the early days of autumn, when the crows succeed the swallows in the stripped fields. And not until then did I learn that she had been corresponding with the illustrious novelist, that she was one of "his unknown correspondents," of whose amorous folly he afterwards made sport. What would you have? My poor wife was a romanticist. Dull, monotonous life, in the regular rut, was abhorrent to her. The great man, who had never seen her, answered her letters to this address: 'Mme. X—, *poste restante*, Villeneuve-Saint-Georges;' and Barbe went every Saturday to get a letter and bring it to her; it was Barbe who disclosed the secret of that correspondence, which was perfectly harmless, I suppose. I say 'I suppose,' for I had the courage to refrain from opening any of the numerous letters, all addressed in the same handwriting, which I found in one of my wife's drawers. I sent them to the illustrious man with these words: "Your unknown at Villeneuve is dead. If you wish to know her name, you will find it on the pediment

of a little church erected to her memory on the Corbeil road, between Draveil and Soisy.' Monsieur Herscher never came."

There was a moment's silence, broken by the cooing of pigeons on the church roof and by the sound of distant bells, brought to them by the river as by a sounding-board. Then Richard, with an unpleasant laugh, replied:

"Your story, my dear Monsieur, proves that all women are alike in deceiving and lying, and that very few men would have been so kind and indulgent as you."

M. Mérivet looked at him, distressed to have been so misunderstood.

"It is my fault," he said. "I have not succeeded in making clear to you the difference that there was between my Irène and myself. She had all that I lacked, beauty and youth; through her I was happy for years without once thinking about her happiness, without once asking her: 'What is there that you would like?' Before impartial judges the wife's wrong-doing would find its justification in that selfishness alone. But how many other reasons would absolve her from blame! For example, what right has a man to demand that his wife shall be content with a single man, when no man is ever content with a single woman? For years Irène lived alone in the house, far from her native country, far from her mother, childless, having her husband only in the evening. No child in the house, that is the strongest excuse. Maternity is the wife's excuse for living,

her true function, her joy, her safeguard. My dear Richard, both of us, you like myself, needed a child."

Fénigan sprang to his feet in a rage. He realized only too well the truth of what the old man was saying to him; Lydie had been unhappy enough over the absence of a child. But, intent upon his vengeance, he did not combine the two lines of reasoning, but contented himself with invective.

"In your view, then, what has happened to us is the best thing that could happen — the wife does well to betray her husband?"

"No! I simply want her to have an opportunity to defend herself; I want you to listen to her before condemning her."

"Women have invented the best way of defending themselves; they run away," said Richard fiercely.

The old man, half closing his shrewd eyes, gently forced him to resume his seat on the stone by his side:

"Oh! yes, they go away, and is n't that more dignified than to remain, lying and concealing their movements? Is not this putting themselves outside the pale of law and society better than adultery, indulged in without danger or scandal? I will say more: your wife's absence makes it easier for you to plead her cause with yourself, to look her misfortune and your own calmly in the face, in order to be fully prepared for the great day of reconciliation and forgiveness."

"I will never forgive," snarled Richard, between his clenched teeth.

The old man shook his head.

"You believe that, because you are still tormented by the horrible pangs of jealousy, from which I have suffered as much as you, and of which you will be cured like me."

"One is cured when one has ceased to love."

"Don't believe it. Jealousy is not the same thing as love, although it certainly is akin to it! One feels it by the pleasure which is mingled with its most atrocious sufferings. O God! when I remember the joy I felt in making my wife say that she was thinking of her painter, that she loved him above everything! It almost killed me, but it was excruciatingly delicious. Nevertheless, love can exist without jealousy, which is its fever, its delirium, so to speak. A delirium of pride oftentimes, rather than of passion. — 'Is it possible? Another man handsomer, more dearly loved than I?' The proof that jealousy is a sentiment outside of love, independent of it, is found in the fact that love exhibits the same characteristics everywhere, in the East and in the West; whereas the jealousy of the Orientals is not like ours. For instance, the Arab has no jealousy for the past, which is perhaps the bitterest and most poignant of all forms of jealousy. I knew a cadi near Orléansville who had a decided preference for one of his four wives, who, to be sure, was more beautiful than the others. Her name was Baia, a former dancer and courtesan. An amorous *roumi*[1] would not have ceased for a day, no, not for an hour, to

[1] A term applied by Arabs to Christians.

torment that poor creature with the escapades of her vile youth. My cadi, on the contrary, was quite indifferent to that dead and buried past, which he knew all about and forgot voluntarily, but was savagely jealous with regard to the present, so that, poor Baia having indulged in a slight flirtation, as you call it, with an army interpreter, her husband gashed her face and breast with I don't know how many blows of his *kandjar*. The woman having escaped death by a miracle, the cadi was sentenced to five years in the penitentiary at Ajaccio; from there he wrote regularly to his brother, who was entrusted with the oversight of his wives and his property, and at the head of every letter, instead of the consecrated Arab formula, *la ilah ill allah*, there was this injunction, always the same: *Keep close watch upon Baia.* A proof that his jealousy did not subside. — And the great man whose name my parents gave me, — a name ill-suited to poor me, for I had never had any heroic qualities — Napoléon, who was of quasi-Arabian origin, had the Oriental type of jealousy. His letters to Joséphine show him to us entirely free from concern about her terribly disorderly past, while every detail of her present life is a subject of suspicion and torture. I have never forgotten the reply that that same Baia whom I just mentioned made to the president of the assize court, when he asked her why she was so inclined to flirt, having such a jealous husband.

"'To teach him to watch me more carefully,' she said calmly. In truth, how many husbands not

only do not watch their wives but expose them to danger, through vanity, through carelessness or awkwardness! Take the painter who stole my wife, did not I go and seek him out, did not I introduce him into my house? And are you yourself, my dear neighbor, certain that you have always watched over Baia?"

At that juncture the vicar's threadbare old cassock crossed the close amid the bees and the long-stemmed poppies. Abbé Cérès, a native of the mountains of Ariège, still active despite his years, his head crowned with an abundance of white hair, bowed very humbly as he passed.

"Be sure and not forget that we breakfast together, Monsieur l'Abbé," said old Mérivet. When the priest was out of range of his voice, he said to Richard:

"There 's the man, there 's the saint who cured me, who saved me."

"What! Monsieur Cérès?" said Richard, who had known the vicar from childhood, from his catechism days, and always treated him a little like an inferior, for the poor abbé was not received in the châteaux or the wealthy bourgeois houses, where he was considered too eccentric, slovenly, with hands of doubtful cleanliness.

"Yes, that admirable priest overcame my pride. I know what is said of Monsieur Cérès in the sacristies of the regular establishment; but if ever you enter the Little Parish Church, and you really must make up your mind to do it once, you will understand why I chose as officiating clergyman

that simple-hearted creature with the bright eyes, heedless of the physical cares of life, and when you hear him repeat the *Pater*, he has a way of saying, 'as we forgive those who trespass against us,' that will touch you to the heart and cure you, for it cured me."

"There are unpardonable insults, wounds which are never cured," exclaimed Richard in a hollow voice. "The outraged man takes his revenge and strikes. I am for Shakespeare against Jesus."

"Oh! yes, Shakespeare, Othello. I read that when I had the disease, to learn something, for information; but your Shakespeare does n't understand it in the least. His Othello is n't a jealous man, he's a negro, a *tropical*, passionate and brutal, nothing more. The sign of jealousy, when it takes possession of a human being, is that it makes the sweetest-tempered person ferocious, hurls the most innocent into all sorts of wickedness, gives to angels, to virgins a satanic imagination and all the passwords of debauchery. To make Othello lifelike, the envious and perverse mind of Iago, the only really jealous character in the play, should enter into him and dwell in him as soon as jealousy fastens itself upon him. The stroke of genius consists in having made him a mulatto, a being of an inferior race, in having given him an ugly face, a species of infirmity. In an infirm lover jealousy seems natural; it is less easy to explain in a fellow of your build, my dear neighbor."

Richard smiled sadly; he knew that he had a

cruel infirmity, that timidity which so many years of marriage had failed to overcome. Once, only once in eight years, had he dared to love his wife as his heart bade him, lip to lip, in close embrace, and that night he was tipsy! While the other, the young monster, had burning words always at command, was an expert in all varieties of caress. Ah! what a lovely wedding journey they must be having! A violent shudder brought him to his feet, with a gesture as of brushing something away, of snatching some horrible vision from before his eyes.

"Where are you going? Richard!"

"No, no. I see nothing but that, it's all over. I can't stand it any longer! Adieu! — adieu!"

He spat out the words in a hoarse voice, as he strode furiously away along the high road. Old Mérivet remained where he left him, deep in thought, a little disturbed by that abrupt departure, wondering if he had not excited the poor husband instead of pacifying him, with all his old stories, his dissertations on jealousy. In the silence and intense heat of the little close, where the humming of the bees seemed the audible vibration of the light on the blue, red, mauve and purple poppies, the good man rose after a moment, completely bewildered. Just then a break passed, filled with people, light dresses and brilliant parasols. The white stone church with the doves flying in circles above the roof, and the old gentleman with the daub of pink at his buttonhole, closing his iron gate with the care-taking and important air of a

proprietor, aroused the curiosity of the excursionists and they stopped.

"May we go in?" inquired one of the brightest parasols from the roof of the vehicle.

M. Mérivet smiled, highly flattered.

"Go in? What for? There is nothing of interest in the church, but every Sunday, at nine, we have mass and a sermon, and I assure you that the mass at the Little Parish Church has not its equal."

He bowed and went into his house on the other side of the road, with a thrill of pride which was heightened when he heard a sweet female voice reading from the break the inscription on the stone:

NAPOLÉON MÉRIVET,
CHEVALIER OF THE ORDER OF SAINT-GRÉGOIRE-LE-GRAND,
BUILT THIS CHURCH.

VI.

THE PRINCE'S JOURNAL.

YOUR letter, my dear Vallongue, was forwarded to me from Messina, which I designated to you as our first port, our tour of the world having been abruptly interrupted.

The effect produced by my absence upon the authorities at Stanislas, the harangue of the director at the refectory, Père Salignon's prayer for the speedy return of the wandering lamb, the whole detailed and picturesque narrative which you gave me of the days immediately following my departure, amused me exceedingly, and I was sadly in need of amusement, for everything is not rose-colored in the trade of seducer. Once more forgive me and accept my thanks for the trouble you took in carrying my valise to Grosbourg in that pouring rain, and for the very frugal breakfast that was undoubtedly offered you on the superb plate with the family coat-of-arms. Don't perjure yourself; I know the usual fare when the duchess is at home. In the midst of the fruit season, you probably had prunes and nuts and raisins for dessert; and then too you had a duchess in a bad humor, to whom I had just made a new application for funds. Under such circumstances the blood of

Baron Silva boils and cries out against me. My father's gloom is less explainable if, as you say, his legs are coming back to him from day to day. He should be radiant. As for Master Jean, my former tutor, that word *cavata* which he whispered in your ear, speaking of his pupil, has only a distant connection with the cravat drawer in which I toss my love letters and gew-gaws. He wished particularly to impress upon you the fact that I am an irresistible ravisher of women. The poor fellow has had an excellent opportunity to convince himself of it, as a constant witness of my love-making, which he accompanied on his violoncello. Yes, the little steeple on top of the hill, which you saw across the river, with several houses huddled close about it, and in the background the great green curtain of the forest of Sénart, is Uzelles church. It is called in the neighborhood the "Little Parish Church," and more picturesquely the "Church of the Good Cuckold," because of the old fellow who had it built. So that the spot was entitled as of right to be the scene of my adventure.

There it was that, on a certain morning of last month, at daybreak, I awaited my mistress, Mme. F——, in a coupé with the Grosbourg arms, a proceeding which did not lack recklessness, you will agree. The ever-delightful Alexandre had arranged everything for our flight, furnished the money, marked out the itinerary; I commend the fellow to you; he is high-priced, but incomparable.

We drove to Melun through the woods, took the train to Lyon, and, after a few hours' rest, drove

to Cassis, where we arrived the following evening. The whole journey was enchanting. That pretty creature leaping from her bed into my carriage, without even taking time to button her dress, our first embraces dipped in mint and dew, the excitement of fancying ourselves pursued in that wild race through the woods, among the creaking branches, with the leaves brushing against the glass; and above all the keen and savage joy of feeling that you are running away from rules and duty, that you are hunting on forbidden ground! At last Cassis, the sea, and at the end of the jetty the *Red, White and Blue*, her great lugger sail half-hoisted, only awaiting our arrival to spread her wings. It was all — oh! it was all super-exquisite.

But we were hardly under way, — it was a divine green and lilac evening and my love and I were just beginning to enjoy, I assure you, the acme of physical pleasure, sitting with our arms around each other on deck, soothed by a fine chorus of men's voices from a Neapolitan coral fisherman that was standing out on the same tack, its joyous notes blending with the soft rippling of the wake and the slatting of the lantern at the masthead, — when, *horrible, most horrible!* my beloved was suddenly seized with a violent attack of seasickness which did not leave her that night or the following day, and which has compelled us to cast anchor for a month, two months, perhaps forever. As a fiasco nothing was ever more complete. I have told you what a delightful travelling companion I had chosen in preference to many others, with a taste for travel

and adventure, passionately fond of boating and sailing, and able to hold a tiller and cast off a sheet as well as myself, in fact the model woman for a sea-voyage. Deuce take it! She must needs go and be seasick! and such seasickness, disgusting and incurable!

What are we to do now? Renounce my fine project of travelling? Send the *Red, White and Blue* back to Cardiff, allowing the worthy Nuitt to keep the fifteen hundred francs advanced for three months? I did n't feel that I had the courage to do it. Nor to settle down bourgeois fashion, the countess and myself — we are the Comte and Comtesse des Uzelles for the purposes of neighbors at table d'hôte and hotel registers — in a villa on the Lake of Lucerne or Geneva, to emigrate eventually to the Italian lakes. Life *à deux* under such conditions means suicide from ennui, unless one is in love or consumptive, which is not my case, — nor yours either, eh, Vallongue?

To give myself time for reflection I have anchored my yacht under the high rock of Monaco and hired the first floor of one of the sumptuous caravanseries grouped about the Casino at Monte-Carlo. Although the season has not yet opened there is a crowd of people at the roulette table, a crowd made up of foreigners only. At first I won a pot of money; then I lost, lost more than I had won, the forty or fifty thousand francs which I had left. Ill-luck having willed that Alexandre should not be at Uzelles to respond at once to my appeal for money, I was obliged to take back from Cap-

tain Nuitt the money I had advanced him; you can imagine his excitement, his dismay, "and what about the crew's wages, *by God!* and Mistress Nuitt's allowance?" — For a week I had to put up with that sort of chatter, with variations fit to make one die with laughter, from the captain, the mate, the steward, honest English faces, purple with consternation, which followed me everywhere, to the post-office, to the gaming-tables, fluttering about the white terraces of the hotel, on the shady road to Monaco, like the frantic, comical ghosts in one of Hanlon Lee's pantomimes. At last, the galleons having arrived, Captain Nuitt, his wife and his crew being paid and satisfied, I am still gambling, because the days are long, but am in no danger of any further unpleasant scrape.

My mistress, who was in despair at first over the shipwreck of our plans of which she is the cause, speedily resigned herself, thanks to the two excellent pianos and the complimentary audience at our caravansery. Add the joy of living in comfort and elegance, and the incomparable satisfaction of hearing a maître-d'hôtel announce: "Madame la Comtesse is served," as she enters the dining-room on Monsieur le Comte's arm. Titles and blazonry are the dream of this little bourgeoise without name or family, who grew up in the orphanage, where she was received in infancy, with the idea that she is of noble, super-noble extraction. It is true that she does not altogether lack distinction; her figure is long and willowy, she has a narrow forehead beautifully framed by her hair, and her manners

are easy and self-assured; but her hands and feet are large, as convenient for the piano — both keyboard and pedal — as they are discouraging concerning her origin. Would she love me if I were not a duke's son and myself a prince? I doubt it. She is too young for my youth to have tempted her, as it might some mature baroness, a friend of my mother's and greedy for soft flesh. Although disguised by my height and my build, my eighteen years embarrass her rather, and so do the innocence and ingenuousness for which she gives me credit. Poor girl!

There are still sentimental women in the world. My mistress is one of those who say to you: "Come and weep on my shoulder." And that reminds me, my dear Wilkie, to tell you — it may be of use to you on occasion — how I overcame her very last resistance. We were alone, at night, in a tool-house in the depths of her park. Ah! the craft I had had to exert to get her there! But that was the end; prayers, lamentations, did not carry me a step farther. To put the finishing touch to the absurdity of my position, — one so easily becomes ridiculous in such a discussion, — a speck of dust gets into my eye. I rub my eye vigorously, pursuing my attack all the while; my eye becomes inflamed, the tears begin to flow, and lo! I suddenly discover that she is yielding. "You are weeping? Do you doubt my love? Oh! no, do not weep, do not doubt, take me!" And the mistake still endures, she believes that I am very much in love, but she does n't care very much for me.

Is n't it a curious thing that she should have plunged into such an adventure with so little of passionate combustibility? Is it true, as she says, that "it was a bore to her to lie?" It certainly is not much of a bore; and in the duel between man and woman, the weapon of weakness, the infantile feminine weapon, the pretty little lie, refined and wicked, carved by artistic little hands, seems to me a most agreeable game. No, lying did not bore her. She was bored, that was all. Doomed to a monotonous and idle life, she preferred to brave all the caprices of my eighteen years, all the dangers of a fire-balloon of straw. What does she hope for? Assuming that she obtains a divorce, I have a thousand excuses in the way of age and social position for not marrying her. However, there is no likelihood of divorce for her. Her husband, M. F——, whom I supposed to be an indifferent boor, is bursting with masculine rage, and may come down upon us one of these mornings. But this husband's jealousy seems to me less formidable than that of my father, the general.

Yes, my dear Vallongue, my father is jealous of me, madly in love with my mistress who, way down in the bottom of her heart, cherishes a more lively sentiment for the hero of Wissembourg than for his innocent son. Is that sentiment born of pity, or did it exist before the general's illness? I cannot say; but for months and months I watched them, her at the piano, him in his invalid's chair, exchange glances more significant than words, and I have often felt that, with a billing and cooing

creature of her sort, that wounded man, gorged with years and with glory, was a dangerous rival. The old fellow fathomed me, he was suspicious of the *cavata*, being convinced that I should triumph in the end, because of my legs and of everything that he lacked. Ah! how unhappy I must have made him, especially when she came to pass the afternoon at Grosbourg, and I took her all over the house and the garden. Fancy Don Juan with his legs paralyzed; fancy the rake of rakes, the man whom no one ever bamboozles but who bamboozles everybody, screwed into an easy-chair and reduced to spying from afar, through a window, to saying to himself all the time: "Where are they? What are they doing?" — suspicious, devoured by jealousy, dragging himself about on his hands and knees to listen at doors, cowardly, frantic, weeping! That man was my father. How well I understand how the idea occurred to him of shutting me up at Stanislas to put an end to that torture! To which move I responded in kind by the double decampment of the young man and his mistress. Now, it may very well happen, especially after the abortive departure of the *Red, White and Blue*, which has left us in his clutches, that my father will take unfair advantage of my minority to hale me back to Grosbourg, or even to Stanislas. No! that would be too infernal a grind, to send me back to prepare for my examinations. Shall I take my mistress with me? The tunic would become her very well. And that is a dénoûment which she certainly did not foresee.

Has she anything on her mind? It would be difficult for me to find out; and really this firmness, this impenetrability of two beings who live side by side, sleep under the same mosquito net, is most extraordinary. Sometimes I think of the shriek of horror she would give if she should suddenly look into my mind; suppose she should inhabit this *me*, such a dark bewildering habitation that I lose myself in it and am afraid, — fancy her horror! or suppose she should simply open this letter! It would mean the death of what little love she may have, unless it should have just the contrary effect. Who was that duchess of the time of Louis XIV. who declared that, to love a man entirely, a woman must despise him a little? Just suppose that, being weary of my mistress and wishing to disgust her with me, I should change her fancy into a passion by exhibiting myself as I really am! No, it is much better to leave everything to fate and Notre Dame de Fourvières, in whom the charming girl has the blindest confidence. Such confidence that, although she left home almost naked, she insisted, when we arrived at Lyon, upon making a pilgrimage to Fourvières and supplying herself with scapularies and consecrated rosaries, before she would buy even a chemise. I did not dissuade her; the tinkling of medallions on a white throat is so pretty, the pleasure which becomes a sin is so sweet, and the transports enjoyed in remorse and fear!

Among the foreigners more or less mongrel who are sojourning at our hotel at this season or who simply come here for their meals, we have

become intimate with a young couple, the Nansens. The husband is a Swede, a professor at some university or other in his country, who, having weak lungs, has obtained a mission in Southern Italy. He is on his way home, having been married eight months to the very pretty daughter of a hotel-keeper at Palermo. A passionate honeymoon, North and South harnessed together and forming an amusing contrast. The man, a red-haired fellow with spectacles, mild-mannered and rickety, with shoulders like broken wings and Northern eyes, shrewd and colorless. Some one has said: "As you go farther North the eyes become brighter and brighter and go out." Such are not the lovely, near-sighted eyes of Nina, Mme. Nansen, which resemble two black grape seeds, tempting and gleaming in that splendid Italian flesh. She is a little stout, but so genuinely youthful and natural, rubbing against her husband with the laugh of a beloved mistress, with the thrill of a happy plant lifting its head and blooming in the sunshine. Our presence at the hotel, where they come for their meals from a villa near by, disturbed the harmony of the family. My Parisian's pretty dresses, her lofty reserve, made a visible impression on M. Nansen, who suddenly discovered that Nina's costumes were loud and her manner vulgar. But the poor fellow was far too timid to allow me to hope that he would ever relieve me from my watch on deck, however great his inclination to do so, and, it may be, mine to have him. What is the explanation

of this timidity, so frequent among us, but entirely unknown among women? I have mentioned M. Poum-poum to you; Nansen's shyness reminds me of him. One of those creatures who stumble as soon as you watch them walking, who cannot close a shop door without an effort, and, in the street, scrape against the walls, would like to make a hole in them and disappear. Poum-poum, who had no secrets from me, told me of a friend of his who had to be tipsy in order to make love to his wife, and I have always believed that that friend was himself. My Swede is of the same temper. One evening in the salon he was playing a slow waltz by Brahms, gazing at my mistress as if in a trance. I was standing by him and said to him in a low tone: "Look out, Nansen, people will notice." Instead of asking me what they would notice, he became very red and dropped his glasses on the keys.

When I joked her on the subject of her mute adorer, Lydie retorted with a smile: "Why, it seems to me that you are equally attracted by his wife." And, in truth, that little Nina did tempt me with her twofold mysterious charm as a woman and a foreigner; moreover, she was dead in love with her husband, hence the more alluring. Did my mistress understand? Was it the fear that I might indulge one of my caprices that induced her to leave Monte Carlo abruptly? At all events, one morning, about a week ago, when the phlegmatic Captain Nuitt came for his orders, she declared that she was ready to go

to sea again, notwithstanding the advice of the doctors. We agreed to drop anchor at Genoa, and in case that short run did not tire her, to go on to Malta and so continue our journey.

"Suppose we take the Nansens as far as Genoa?" I suggested in a careless tone. After seeking to read my thoughts in the depths of my eyes, which is by no means agreeable, she made up her mind.

"Let us take the Nansens," she said, very proud as always.

At two o'clock the same day, the *Red, White and Blue* left Monaco under full sail. But before night, when we were off Vintimille, we fell in with the prettiest kind of a squall; hail, thunder, north wind, a devil of a sea, and Mme. F—— in a heap on her bed, without strength to move or groan, at the last extremity. Near by, among the lightning-flashes in the salon, Nansen was vomiting into the wash-basin, with no thought of love. His wife and I might have sat on the couch and embraced before him, and he would not have had the strength to lift his hand. But poor Ninette was far from any such thoughts. Wild with fear, she passed the whole evening on her knees, clutching her husband's chair, and whenever the lightning flashed through the portholes, she crossed herself frantically, shrieked out prayers and sobbed: "Sainte-Hélène, Sainte-Barbe, Sainte Marie-Madeleine." To flirt under these conditions would require the romantic and blasphemous soul of one of Eugène Sue's characters.

The next day fresh complications. Nansen had a severe hemorrhage caused by his nausea; and as the ship's pharmacy contained no perchloride we had to put in at San-Remo to obtain speedy relief for our invalids. That evening, while the *Red, White and Blue* was firing salutes without end, preparatory to resuming her berth beside His Highness's yacht at the foot of the rock of Monaco, we all returned to Monte-Carlo by the Corniche road. At the hotel a letter from my father awaited me, a warlike trumpet-call in the name of honor and fatherland. For the last hundred years we have always had a Dauvergne under the flag and in high rank; if war should break out to-morrow, if France should need the services of her sons, what one of our family would be found in the ranks! Four pages of this lyrical stuff to induce me to let my mistress go once and for all, and to enter at Saint-Cyr. I leave it to you to judge whether all that bugling had any effect on me.

War is a bore; I consider it an idiotic, filthy thing. Of the two ways of looking at a battlefield, — the vertical way, from the standpoint of the cavalier with unsheathed sword, erect in his stirrups, and with a glass of brandy in his head, and the horizontal, from the standpoint of the poor wounded devil, who drags himself along in the blood and filth with a hole in his side — I have never been able to appreciate any but the last, which has disgusted, if not terrified me. On the day after Wissembourg, my father said, in speak-

ing of the battle: "There was plenty of fresh meat there." And that is how war always appears to me, all fresh-killed meat, crushed and carried on carts, and not firm flesh on the hoof, alive and quivering. And yet I am no coward. If you had seen me the other night dipping my nose in the vinegar with the sturdy crew of the *Red, White and Blue!* I did n't shirk. No, I shall have my chance like everybody else, but I have a holy horror of carnage. Moreover, the words *country, flag, family*, arouse in me only hypocritical echoes, mere wind and noise. You are like me, my dear Vallongue, with this difference, that in you everything is the result of study and reflection. Your brain, like those of so many young Frenchmen, is a conquest of German philosophy, a conquest much more serious than that of Alsace, or even of Lorraine. Kant, Hartmann, and more than all the rest, the famous fellow — you know whom I mean — have taken down the scenery piece by piece before your eyes; profound study of sentiment and sensation have destroyed in you the faculty of feeling.

But how happens it that I, who know nothing, who have never read or learned anything, am at the same stage of moral weariness and decrepitude? Why am I already withered, corroded, at barely eighteen? Whence comes this contempt for all duties, for all tasks, — this revolt against every law, no matter what it may be? My name, my fortune, my youth, — and the mind of an anarchist. Why is it? Do you, Vallongue, to whom

I tell everything, who know me just as I am, try to explain me to myself. Do you look upon me — your letter seems to imply as much — as simply a product of the new school, a specimen of the very latest yacht model? In that case our elders will be surprised. Those who are passing away and those who are coming resemble one another hardly at all, I know; but this time, if I am to judge by my father and myself, the bridges between the two generations are entirely demolished, and in passing from one bank to the other misunderstanding may be exaggerated to hatred.

At all events, I have placed my own interpretation on the general's letter, reading in it only his return to life and his longing to see his dear Mme. F——, by whom, I am bound to say, his expenditure of military eloquence was relished much more heartily than by his son. My sentimental darling's eyes were filled with tears over it; for some time past, by the way, these attacks of oversensitiveness on her part have been frequent, and rather disturbing. What an adventure that would be! In this instance, however, her tears came from a wholly mental source; I felt that she was completely upset, ready for the greatest sacrifices. Ah! the old rascal, his letter was not written for me so much as for her who read it over my shoulder, thinking of him meanwhile. And I anticipate now a still more energetic paternal demonstration. I will wager that he proposes to come in person to get up a touching melodramatic scene, in order to bring down his mistress and his boy with one

stone, — two birds instead of one. I wonder if he thinks that I will wait for him! In the first place, roulette no longer amuses me, — another sensation fallen into the pit; it was n't worth the trouble of roasting in this Central African climate, blinded with the glare and the hot dust, and deafened by this chirping of crickets which seems like the monotonous hum of the light.

The best plan would be to start off on my yacht, placing Lydie in charge of friends who would bring her to me, by land, to some out-of-the-way corner of Bretagne or Italy. But in whose charge? It 's all over with the Nansens. I forgot to tell you that the unfortunate Swede was carried off by galloping consumption the day after our return. In that confession, Monsieur le Philosophe, let me submit to you as to my confessor a mysterious, almost untellable case of passion.

Imagine the Swede gathered to his fathers. For two days we lived in the atmosphere of that death, my mistress passing hours with the despairing widow, I and my brave Nuitt, whose leisure I employ in all sorts of ways, attending to the triple casket of oak, lead and fir, in which the deceased was to be taken home, and also to matters of transportation, routes, etc. We literally lived on that Swede; his ashes were mingled with our food, disturbed our slumbers. On the third day, yesterday morning, the countess said to me:

"You must go and see Nina; you have been very kind and obliging to her, and she would like to thank you."

Nothing could be more commonplace than that call. Why was I so moved, so passionately moved, as I entered the little garden of the Nansen villa in a green ravine ten minutes' walk from the sea? Was it the sirocco, the breath of the rose-laurels? I was conscious that my mouth was parched, my hands burning and my whole being invaded by a sensual vertigo which did not prevent my thinking of death. Indeed, how could I avoid thinking of it? It was master of that house and filled it with the disorder and dismay which it brings in its train. Those windows on the first floor wide open, that one hermetically closed through which could be seen the dismal yellow light of tapers burning in broad daylight, and everywhere, even at the further end of the garden, even under the laurels, the horrible odor of drugs and sawdust that hovers around death chambers.

I waited five minutes in a parlor on the first floor, seated on a straw-covered couch. Steps on the stairs. Nina. — I have told you, have I not, that there had been nothing between that woman and myself? On the night before her misfortune we had laughed and joked together all the evening on the hotel terrace. A lively flirtation. But I tried in vain to entertain her, she was occupied mainly in watching her husband as he sat at the piano with my mistress, in front of a sonata for four hands. I had not seen her since. Tell me why *I was sure* of what was going to happen. She entered the room, very pale, hastily dressed

in a black dress fitting tight to her graceful and lithe figure; I could feel the presence of her lovely, dead-white Italian flesh beneath it. Her eyes shone between her inflamed, swollen lids. She threw herself down beside me without a word; our hands met and the fire was lighted. — "Ah! Monsieur Charley!" — In an instant I had her against my breast, her lips against mine, worn out as she was by her nights of vigil, freely offered to me, beside herself, half-swooning in a long, feverish kiss which smelt of carbolic acid and phenol. — Just at that moment her housekeeper entered to ask for a pair of sheets and snatched from between my teeth an opportunity that was destined not to be renewed.

Now tell me what you think of this, my philosopher. By virtue of what diabolical relaxation of her nerves did that woman tear herself away from that dead man whom she loved and lamented, to fall incontinently into my arms? Can it be that some aphrodisaical air-current hovers around coffins? or is it simply that life takes its revenge in an immediate and violent outburst? I have a conviction that doctors know more than they tell about these moments of perverse passion, of which they doubtless take advantage often. I myself had already undergone the mysterious influence once before, under far more terrible circumstances; — love and death, Vallongue!

I did not expect to send my journal until I had come to some decision and fixed upon our

next place of sojourn, but lo and behold, everything is in the air again. My father has not arrived, but Othello. This morning who should enter our room — as spruce as ever but with a terribly long face — but M. Alexandre, who, since my departure, has been acting as a spy upon Mme. F ——'s husband in behalf of my family, and came hither on the express with him. Luckily, this ferocious husband is exploring Monaco, where he believes us to be, thus giving us time to form a plan.

More news soon. The affair does not lack gravity; but I feel my pulse and find it strong.

CHARLEXIS.

VII.

AFTER leaving M. Mérivet abruptly, at the conclusion of their conversation by the little church, Richard ran into M. Alexandre; and the smile at the corner of the flunkey's mouth, the irony which he fancied he could detect in it, cast a gleam of light into his mind.

"Where are they, the villains? — Why, that man knows; he knows it through Grosbourg, and Rosine at our house knows it through him."

And as he strode along the already scorching road, his short, compact shadow beside him repeated the gestures with which he accompanied a furious soliloquy.

"What a fool I am not to have thought of it sooner, instead of going so often to cool my heels at the post-office! — If only the girl will speak now! Oh! she shall speak, or else — "

At that moment Rosine Chuchin, whose face was a younger and more refined copy of the repulsive countenance of her father the keeper, appeared at the small park gate, at the top of the two steps from which she had nearly killed her master with her announcement of Lydie's departure. Arrayed in a stylish hat and dainty shoes, with a prayer-book with gilt clasp under her arm,

the servant was waiting for some one. She stepped aside to let Richard pass, with the meaningless, servile smile in which one can read whatever one chooses; but he took her by both arms and turned her with her back against the gate, which he closed with a kick.

"Where is Madame? — You know — tell me instantly — where is Madame?"

He shook her roughly. She, utterly bewildered, unable to understand at first, stammered:

"Why, no, Monsieur Richard, I don't know where Madame is. When she came back from high mass she found a despatch —"

"I am talking about your mistress — my — my — wife." It required an effort for him to say the word. "Where is she?" — And seeing that she was on the point of lying: "I have never interfered with your performances; but I know all about them, as you can imagine. If you think I don't hear you when your lover comes to the laundry — I need say only a word and my mother would turn you and Père Chuchin into the street —"

"Oh! Monsieur Richard —"

"No double-dealing then. When Alexandre writes to them, where does he address his letters?"

The involuntary swaying of that robust country girl's whole body bore witness to her uncertainty; but it ended by her whispering the name of the town and the hotel. Richard was thunderstruck. He supposed they were far away, beyond the sea, entirely out of reach. Had he not heard of a

journey to the Indies? And lo! instead of leaping upon his vengeance when it proved to be so near at hand, he felt that he suddenly grew calmer, but without abandoning his proposed departure. for he bade Rosine prepare his valise.

"You know, the small valise I carry when I go to the Mérogis ponds hunting. Above all things, not a word to my mother. Where has she gone, did you say?"

"To the station at Villeneuve, with the victoria."

"Mamma gone to Villeneuve! What for, pray?"

Mme. Fénigan never left the house except to go to mass.

"I don't know, Monsieur Richard, but I will take advantage of her being away to get the valise, which is at the Château."

She started along the hedgerow. He called her back.

"Go to my room at the same time, and get —"

He could not make up his mind to ask for his revolver which was in his table-drawer. That would have been to emphasize his purpose, which was already a sort of burden to him.

"No — no matter, I will go myself."

As he examined his weapon he was angry with himself for that sudden and inexplicable softening.

"Why is it? How can the thought that tomorrow at this time I may be avenged if I choose, how can that thought have cooled me down so? In God's name, am I a downright coward, or simply incapable of making up my mind?"

Thereupon, to excite his passion, to bring back

his furious impulse of a few moments earlier, he took out Charlexis' letters to his wife, which he kept in a box in his room in order to have them always at hand, under his eyes. Ah! that was soon done. In that slightly sluggish brain, retarded in action by the benumbing influence of outdoor life, the imagination needed to be quickened by external images. In like manner certain voluptuaries resort to books and pictures to quicken their deadened passions. He knew the letters by heart; but as he read them the sentences took shape, the words gleamed like glances.

The rumbling of the victoria on the gravel tore him away from these visions. His mother, already! He hastily returned the letters to their hiding-place, vexed to think that he had not gone away without looking at them. Now he must invent an excuse to explain his journey and avoid tears and entreaties. He cudgelled his brains as he went down to meet her, and appeared at the top of the steps as the carriage drew up at the foot. What was his amazement to see the coachman's box piled high with boxes, and, seated beside Mme. Fénigan, under a brilliant scarlet umbrella, a young woman dressed in the same scarlet from the feather in her travelling-cap to the open-work silk stockings which she showed as she leaped out of the carriage with the impetuosity of a young boy.

"Good morning, Richard!" she cried cheerily, as she assisted Mme. Fénigan to alight, that lady meanwhile making signs to her son. The

voice rang out, fresh and youthful, with a pretty Parisian accent which he had heard before, which was almost familiar. However, Richard was still hesitating when his mother, coming up the steps on the arm of the young woman in red, announced her:

"Élise, you know, your cousin from Lorient."

A swarm of memories, of love-lorn, happy moments, rushed confusedly into his mind. He saw his cousin, a plump, little creature, galloping by his side along the level roads of Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois, at the door of the landau in which her father, François Belleguic, a rich contractor and builder, and Mme. Belleguic, born de Kerkabelec, were discussing with Mme. Fénigan the approaching marriage of their children, who already understood each other remarkably well. The two mothers unfortunately were too much alike to agree. Mme. Belleguic, born de, etc., was a Bretonne cut out of the solid rock, another "kindly tyrant" who undertook to drive everybody as she drove her husband, with a strong hand and a tight rein. "François, who is not an eagle," she would say when she spoke of him, in his presence; and the husband always bowed, smiling and happy; and indeed there was little of the eagle about him; he had submitted to the conjugal yoke, which eventually twisted his neck out of shape. Richard, after a violent scene between the two "kindly tyrants," was bound to take sides with his mother against the parents of the young woman upon whom he was already bestowing the caressing

glances of a fiancé; he sacrificed himself, largely through weakness, the material impossibility of saying no, but he retained in the depths of his heart a feeling of genuine regret which disappeared beneath the obliterating force of time and of other deeper wounds. In the twelve years that had elapsed, Madame Belleguic, born de Kerkabelec, had gone to join her forefathers. François who was not an eagle, in despair at having no one to tell him so, followed his wife to the grave. Élise, who had married a drunken, brutal surgeon in the navy, who beat her with machine-like regularity, had obtained a legal separation, and subsequently a divorce, as soon as the divorce law was passed. At first Mme. Fénigan thundered against her with all the indignation of an orthodox Catholic; indeed, Élise's action was at the time a pretext for bitter-sweet discussions between her and Lydie, in which the "dear mothers" and "dear daughters" passed one another hissing amid corrosive vapor. Then, when her daughter-in-law had gone, having to reckon with the loneliness and depression of her son, who, she had supposed, would be satisfied with her undemonstrative maternal affection, a change was wrought in her ideas concerning the *divorcée*, and even concerning divorce. She remembered that Élise and Richard had been fond of each other. She had a twinge of remorse for the caprice which caused her to break off that match which would have saved them all so much grief, — remorse that was the more sincere because the passing of the Belleguics left in her hands all

the authority of which she was so jealous. Thereupon, without any definitely formed decision, guided by her maternal instinct and the advice of the curé of Draveil, her confessor, she wrote secretly to her cousin at Lorient to come and pass some time at Uzelles, and the cousin, who bore no malice, accepted at once.

The first effect of her presence was to prevent Richard's immediate departure. He postponed it until an evening train and breakfasted opposite Élise, pleased to renew his acquaintance with her bright laugh, the pretty upward curl of her eyes, and her dazzlingly red lips. She was of that privileged race upon whom life pours in a torrent its vexations and catastrophes, without leaving a single trace of them behind. He found her after so many years of sorrow and tears as merry and frolicsome as ever, still with her provincial taste for tinsel and gaudy colors, still with her little rows of grains of rice between her lips, her pink and brown cheek with its peach-like down, but with arms somewhat stouter and a mastery of the art of décolleté, ingenuous yet audacious, well adapted to intimidate her bashful neighbor at table. Again and again Richard turned and stole a glance, blushing hotly, and thereby filled the honest coquettish girl's heart with joy; his mother had said to her simply: "My boy is sick, cure him for me."

Just as they finished breakfast, Élise uttered a little shriek of dismay. "Where is my bag?" A little red leather bag in which she carried silver,

notes, jewels, all her possessions. They were not alarmed at first. She had arrived within an hour and was still excited. The little bag would surely be found, like the fan, the rings, the umbrella, which were scattered all around that attractive young person by her constant somersaults of body and mind. After a long search, however, they were forced to conclude that the little bag had been left in the train, or perhaps at the Villeneuve station, Libert, the coachman, deposing that he did not see it on the box with the other luggage.

"Let Libert go back to the station," said Mme. Fénigan.

"Thanks, cousin, I am too anxious, I will go myself."

"I will drive you, Élise," suggested Richard. "We will take the open buggy, so that we can go faster."

As the bell was just ringing for the servants' breakfast, the excellent fellow went to the stable to harness the horse himself, in order not to incommode anybody or lose any time. Left alone, the two women, obeying a common impulse, rushed into each other's arms.

"Ah! my dear girl, if you could!"

"Why, it seems to me affairs are progressing very well. Let me alone and you 'll see."

"Do you find him changed?"

"Principally because he 's paler and his face has lengthened out. I like him better so, he is more distinguished. But you told me that he was so depressed, cousin, and he is humming all the time."

She imitated the "poum-poum," the rumbling accompaniment to the sonata.

"It's when he's thinking of her that he hums like that," said the mother.

"Then he's always thinking of her. Is it possible after what she has done to him?"

"You don't understand — nor do I, my poor child."

Richard called from below; he was already in his seat and his cousin ran down the steps to join him.

Two long leagues lay between Uzelles and Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. In the light vehicle, which he drove himself at full speed, Richard made the distance in half an hour. When the buggy entered the station yard, filled with omnibuses, cabs, private carriages, M. Alexandre, manœuvring amid the jostling crowd of Parisians in their Sunday clothes, with a Scotch cap on his head and his travelling-bag over his shoulder, was rolling a cigarette in front of the waiting-room, watching that little world of frequenters of the suburbs with the listless, superior air of the traveller who has a long journey before him. Advised by Rosine Chuchin of her master's plans, and then of the cousin's arrival, he reflected that Richard could go only by the evening express, and that with a few hours' start he himself would arrive in time to warn the lovers. His plan, his stratagems, all were prepared. He proposed to take advantage of the terror, the confusion of the first moments to get the prince on board the *Red, White and Blue,*

to take the lady away by land, and when they were once parted to keep them apart by suspicion and falsehood, to make reconciliation impossible.

Richard's sudden appearance in the noisy courtyard threw all his plans into confusion. From a corner of the third class waiting-room, he saw him leap down from the carriage and go out to the track, evidently to take the same train with himself. What was he to do in that case? How could he board the train without being seen? And on the road, and when they arrived? Suddenly Richard appeared again, waving a little red bag, which he joyfully exhibited at a distance to the lady who had remained outside in the buggy. He resumed his seat by her side, took the reins, and, without even touching his trotter with the lash of his whip, disappeared down the rocky street of Villeneuve from the prying eyes of the ex-steward. Would Richard go after all, or had his cousin's arrival led him to change his purpose? Surely there was nothing in his appearance to indicate the jealousy-ridden Othello, meditating his revenge. The train from Paris rolled into the station, jarring the platform. Doors opened and shut. "Passengers for Lyon, Marseille, Nice." M. Alexandre hesitated a second; then a wicked laugh curled his clean-shaven lip, and he leaped into the nearest car.

Élise had expressed a desire to take the longest road home.

"I am like Little Red-Riding Hood," she said

laughingly, "I like cross-roads and détours where you lose your way running after everything that has wings, everything that smells sweet. Afraid of wolves? Never in my life. When Red-Riding Hood knows what she 's about, the wolf 's the one to be pitied."

Intoxicated by the splendor of the day, the rapidity of their pace, the joy of having found her jewels, she reminded one of Red-Riding-Hood as we fancy her with her scarlet hood and her rippling, bell-like laugh. They were driving along the Yères, a little Watteau stream of a deep, cold blue-black, sleeping beneath high trees, between green slopes whose fresh, cool aspect was in marked contrast to the white furnace of the road. "Look out! look out!" As the buggy flew along, the Parisian families who blocked the country roads with their Sunday caravans, stepped hastily aside. At the windows of microscopic villas of the burlesque variety, with little turrets, balconies, and decorations of porcelain or light pink rockwork, curious faces peered forth, and on all those faces, worn by ennui or fatigue, Richard surprised the same expression of joy, of sympathy called forth by the passing of the attractive creature who smiled at them from her seat. How could he escape the coaxing charm of that smile, the man who sat beside that young woman, feeling her living warmth, the cool breath of her chirping speech and her flying curls? At every moment, as she took the reins or the whip from him, she touched his cheek with her plump, bare arm, or wishing to

point out to him a mammoth magnolia in the centre of a lawn, or a squad of little yellow ducks following the thread of the stream, she would lean forward until the collar of her dress, around a full white neck, was close to his eyes. Although he did not suspect it, those feminine currents charmed him, relaxed his nerves with their soothing warmth.

When they entered the village of Yères, through which the high road runs, they had to slacken their pace. The provincial festival, proclaimed afar by organs, drums, trumpets and music-boxes, and by a pungent odor of frying, was evidenced by the booths and wooden horses in long lines on both sides of the road. Pressed close, almost carried by the crowd, which became more compact as they went on, the horse could not move faster than a walk.

"How does it go, Eugène? How are the young couple?"

At that question from Fénigan, Eugène Sautecœur, alias the Indian, who was walking near the buggy, his shoulders on a level with the seat, turned about, showing his great, anxious, purple face beneath the regulation round cap.

"Not so bad, thank you, Monsieur Richard, and the children the same. Only the boy is doing his twenty-eight days, and I have the daughter-in-law on my hands. That is n't convenient all the time. This morning we had some of her husband's friends to breakfast. She wanted to bring them to the fête. *Bon sang!* how I hate it!"

He took a colored silk handkerchief from his

cap and wiped his perspiring brow, across which ran an angry fold. And suddenly, glancing around him at the crowd, which his tall figure dominated, he exclaimed: "Ah! the hussy — she has fooled me again."

He gave a military salute and walked quickly toward the booths in quest of his daughter-in-law, whom Richard saw a moment later on the Church square, in a group of young bloods of the café-concert type, in high, wilted collars, firing at a manikin.

"However vigilant your Indian may be," said Élise, "I fancy that he will have hard work watching that quarry."

"So I think, cousin; but she must be careful, Père Sautecœur would be terrible in his wrath."

"More so than the husband?"

"Oh! the husband; he 's one of my kind."

Upon that reply, uttered in a sorrowful tone — the first and only allusion he had made to his distress since Élise's arrival — Richard gave the reins to his horse, who was impatient to be out of the crowd, and drove swiftly down the sloping street to the Yères. Having crossed the little bridge, he turned into a shady road running between fragrant, blooming parks of vast extent. In the distance the vesper bells rang out over the tumult of the rustic fête they were leaving behind them, slow and grave, like the heartrending sentence which had unexpectedly cast a gloom over their trivial, laughing conversation.

At Uzelles that evening, after the inexorable

curfew had rung for all the inhabitants of the Château, a light burned late in Élise's bedroom. Mme. Fénigan, in a white flannel *peignoir*, candle in hand, did not tire of listening to the description of their drive; and the candle burned down, and Little Red-Riding-Hood's eyelids grew heavy ere the mother, who had come in for a few moments, discovered that she had been there two hours. Richard, meanwhile, amazed beyond measure to find himself in his own bed instead of flying along the road to Monte-Carlo, wondered why his pillow seemed so soft, his sheets so cool, after the fever of the preceding nights; and why, when his mother's affection and Père Mérivet's advice had failed to turn him aside from his mad undertaking, a half-open corsage, a mass of braided hair brushed away from a neck of glistening whiteness had sufficed to change the direction of his thoughts. That the sight of a bit of woman's flesh should be so irresistible, that in a heart so torn by anguish as his there should be room for any other desire than vengeance and death! All the poor devil's philosophy went astray and floundered about in such thoughts long after his light was extinguished.

The next day he did not go, did not even mention it. There was but one saddle-horse in the stable; they must needs procure another for Élise, and Richard fell into the habit of riding every day with her. As he was taciturn by inclination and by temperament, equestrianism had in his eyes the advantage that in the saddle one does not talk, one only half thinks, being engrossed by the

necessity of watching one's mount, it may be the most freakish or timid of beasts, of a breadth of vision entirely disproportioned to ours. One becomes a horse oneself to a certain extent. In the crisis he was passing through, hardly daring to look into his own mind, Richard found this interruption of his self-absorption most agreeable. When Mme. Fénigan saw him return after one of these long rides in the fresh air, with beaming face and steady voice and hands, without that wrinkle always in the same corner of the forehead, denoting the same gloomy cast of thought, she too was radiant, imagined that he would soon be cured, and was quite ready to believe, had not Rosine confided to her the incident of the valise, that Richard, was not so grievously wounded as the curé of Draveil and that old fool of a Père Mérivet declared.

"Well, my girl?" — That was the question she asked every evening in a mysterious, mischievous tone, as she installed herself in Élise's bedroom; but the days and the riding excursions succeeded one another without leading to anything decisive.

"I do all that I can," the young woman would say, almost in tears. And the mother encouraged her, took counsel with her as to the best way of overcoming Richard's shyness. "For it is that, you see, my dear, nothing but that that holds him back. All men are bashful, and he is more so than all other men."

"Do you think so, cousin? Then I will try again."

She tried.

Being overtaken by a storm one day in the plain of Courcouronne, they took shelter, after a wild race, under a shed on the outskirts of the town. There was very little room and their horses were close together.

"How my heart beats! Just feel, Richard."

With a thoughtless movement she took his hand and pressed it against the throbbing waist of her habit.

Richard's senses were thrown into sad confusion. — "The other, the other!" he murmured, slipping his arm around the waist, which made no resistance; and for five minutes they embraced, pale and silent with sensuous enjoyment.

Hitherto she had been of no more importance in his eyes than one of the swallows that flew in through the open window of the isba, beating its wings against the rafters and the sword-hilts; now he began to observe her more closely, curious to know what was concealed in that heart always overflowing with merriment behind that constant chirping. Why should he not love her if she would cure him of his longing for the absent, especially since his mother seemed to desire it so earnestly? He was thinking about it as he played a game of chess with Mme. Fénigan in the salon after breakfast, on the day following that terrible storm, which had lasted all night, digging ravines in the garden and making all the roads impassable. Élise, who had been embarrassed in Richard's presence since the preceding night,

anxiously awaiting a declaration which she hoped for, which she felt was near at hand, was standing at a window, looking out.

"What is the matter, pray?" asked Mme. Fénigan, distracted from her game by shouts and hooting.

"It's that old beggar — what's his name? Père Georges — in such a condition! And all those ragamuffins after him. They have taken his stick. The poor fellow! he's going to fall!"

There was a burst of laughter out-of-doors. Tipsy, hideous, covered with scales, with all the mud from the high road on his rags and in his beard, the old tramp, trying to put to flight the band of little jackals baying at his heels, had dropped his stick of which the urchins had taken possession, and now, unable to take a step, he was standing with his back against the wall of the farm, clutching, slipping, swaying back and forth, straightening himself up to fall again, weeping, begging for his stick, which Robin the roadmender, aroused from his noonday nap and his barrow, succeeded at last in putting into his hands. Thereupon was enacted a little drama of which Richard, with his face against the window-pane, followed the developments. While the roadmender, in obedience to a compassionate impulse almost animal in its nature, had taken the poor old man by the arms and was steadying him as well as he could on his tottering legs, wagoners from the farm, returning from watering their horses, stopped

to look, and their loud laughter shook the whole road. Embarrassed at first, then ashamed, Robin began to jostle the old man, who became more and more confused, and dragged him with him in his swaying. The laughter redoubled. Thereupon the roadmender let go his hold, and Père Georges, bewildered, desperate, feeling about like a blind man, fell forward on his hands and knees, and finally sprawled at full length in the pile of mud carefully shovelled from the road to the foot of the wall.

"It is outrageous!" cried Richard, indignant at the brutal delight of all those boors. Élise, mistaking the cause of his anger, deemed it her duty to manifest her horror of drunkenness, especially in old people. He thought her very stupid, and Mme. Fénigan, knowing her son's weakness for tramps, and especially for that particular one, hastened to make a diversion.

"Just look, children — here's a miracle! Abbé Cérès in a new cassock!"

"Abbé Cérès is the vicar of the Little Parish Church, isn't he?" inquired Élise.

"Yes, cousin, and a most excellent man; but I agree with our dear curé that he is a little lacking in dignity, in ecclesiastical dignity. Fancy that he took all the Lucriots into his house, that family of poachers, the grandmother and the two daughters, while the father was in prison at Melun."

Richard turned upon her abruptly. "If it had not been for that priest, mother, when Lucriot returned from Melun after his acquittal —"

He interrupted himself to look out on the road, where the uproar was increasing.

Abbé Cérès had not a new cassock simply; his broad-brimmed hat, his buckled shoes also made their first appearance on that occasion. And the worthy man, proud to visit his poor in holiday attire, was thinking: "They surely will not recognize me," when he was stopped by the crowd. Richard could not hear what he said to the old beggar, covered with mud and filth and drowned in a pool of slime; he understood only that the priest, after a fruitless appeal to those who stood around, stooped over that bunch of unsightly rags, lifted him up, took him by the arm and led him away, caring no more for the jeering crowd than for his fine cassock.

As they disappeared at a bend in the road, Élise said with a laugh:

"Monsieur l'Abbé will be nice and clean when he gets through."

"If he only does n't take him home with him," added Mme. Fénigan.

"That reminds me," said Richard, hurrying to the door. "I have a place myself for that poor old fellow."

"You 're not going to bring the creature here," cried his mother. But he did not hear, being already out on the road.

He returned late. They were waiting dinner for him; a dinner of twelve covers, such as were frequently given at Uzelles in honor of the cousin, the guests being those who used to attend the

Sunday musical parties, the notary who succeeded Maître Fénigan, the owner of the Little Parish Church, and Jean Delcrous, judge of the court of Corbeil, a short, thick-set man, who, being always in quest of a wealthy match, was prowling around Élise, with wolf's teeth parted and gleaming between his stiff black whiskers. But on that evening Little Red-Riding Hood was in no frolicsome or coquettish mood. Richard's indifference after the scene of the night before, and what she had learned about the old vagabond, who had long been called "Lydie's pauper," were a sufficient cause of disturbing reflections a little too weighty for that doughy cerebellum.

"Well, cousin, what about your friend, your old beggar?" she asked as she took her place at table by Richard's side, aggressive and armed for the fray, her arms and shoulders protruding from a most becoming pink muslin. He answered that his friend was asleep in a little cabin on the river-bank, where Chuchin kept his oars and nets.

"On the river-bank? — Bless me! he will be cold."

"I have had a stove put in," said Richard calmly. The idea of a stove in the oar shed made her laugh heartily.

"Neither mind nor heart," he thought, having no suspicion of the chagrin concealed beneath that school-girl's laugh. How different from his wife, who was so full of sympathy for the poor, who was so grieved when she was unable to give alms to wayfarers, and flew into a rage with Li-

bert the coachman, and with the horses, whom she accused of being unwilling to stop or of always stopping too late, when the beggar was far away, out of hearing. The poor devils knew it so well that when they passed the landau they never looked, never put out their hands. Oh! the sympathetic tone in which Lydie told him that! it still rang in Richard's ears, behind his cousin's spiteful little laugh.

"Ah! I can see you installing Père Georges with his air-tight. How did he thank you?"

"By kissing him on both cheeks," chuckled the Corbeil magistrate.

"Horror!" exclaimed Élise with a shriek of dismay, repeated in chorus by the whole table.

Delcrous, overjoyed to see that his bait had taken, continued:

"In my case, it was no simple beggar, but an assassin, a man condemned to death, who tried once to kiss me by main force."

"Come, come, Richard, it is n't possible," said Mme. Fénigan with comical indignation. "Has n't Abbé Cérès' gospel turned your head on this subject?"

Richard said nothing. The magistrate availed himself of his silence:

"It was at the outset of my magisterial career, in a little hole called Souk-Ahras —"

A voice interrupted him:

"Souk-Ahras, on the frontier of Tunis, excellent soil for raising alfa."

"My dear Monsieur Mérivet, you have your

Algeria at your finger-tips. I went to Souk-Ahras as justice of the peace, performing the duties of a prosecuting attorney under the Republic. About an hour after I arrived, just at nightfall, I was arranging my belongings on the ground floor apartment of my predecessor, furnished with dilapidated straw chairs and a small iron bed, when my clerk, my *chaouch*, came to bring me a message from the condemned man. — 'What condemned man?' — Imagine if you can my mental condition when I learned that there was a poor devil in the town jail whom they were preparing to guillotine the next morning; my functions as justice of the peace in a district not under martial law required me to attend him as far as the posts of the scaffold. What luck to arrive just the day before! At the jail I found a sort of wild beast, a Maltese from Port Mahon, dark-skinned, thick-lipped, hairy, who gazed at me with little yellow eyes, affectionate and stupid, swimming in tears, and in the jargon of a Spanish cow begged me to let him kiss me. He stunk like a lion, the villain! Finding that he had nothing more to say to me, I went to bed, being worn out by my two nights in a *corricolo*. About three o'clock in the morning my *chaouch* woke me out of a sound sleep: '*Ia didon, moucié zouge de paix.*' — 'What 's the matter?' — The condemned man wanted to speak to me again. The animal was abusing my patience. But how could I refuse a man at the point of death? The whole jail was awake. — 'We have no chaplain,' said the keeper apologetically, 'perhaps the man has something

to disclose.' — They took me to him, and lo! as soon as he saw me, he began again to sigh and sob. — 'Ah! Monsieur Delcrous! Monsieur Delcrous!' — I had no choice but to kiss him again; for that was all he wanted, to rub his thick lip against my cheeks, which he flooded with tears. 'Ah! Monsieur Delcrous, such a great villain as I am!' — On the way to the scaffold, and when he alighted from the cart which I followed on horseback with the gendarmes, he again requested and I had to grant the same burlesque favor. I might have believed that it was some joke, if the occasion had not been so tragic, and if the records had not made clear to me the motive of that savage impulse of affection. His name was Juan Delcrous, the same baptismal name and surname as my own, although he was born at Port-Mahon and I at Cahors."

"What crime had your condemned man committed?" asked a female voice. "Can it be told?"

"Oh! certainly, Madame. He had cut off the head of his mistress, who was false to him."

"To think that he would have been acquitted if he had done it to his lawful wife!" murmured Napoléon Mérivet; "and yet it is the same crime, and even more dastardly, because he knows he won't be punished."

"Whereupon the divorce law very wisely intervenes," observed the notary in his pragmatical voice. Little Napoléon made a gesture which endangered the superb baked carp which was being passed around the table:

"Oh! yes, this divorce legislation is all very fine! What one good feature has it?"

"Why, that it puts an end to a barbarous custom and rids the husband, without bloodshed, of the wife who dishonors him."

"As if the husband who is betrayed and who kills stops to think about the dishonor! He kills in a jealous frenzy, because his pride and his love are betrayed, sometimes from fear of ridicule, because his position is so embarrassing, and also because false moralists whisper murder in his ear. And do you suppose divorce will prevent any of those things? Can you imagine Othello sending a stamped paper to Desdemona?"

Delcrous, whose object was to flatter Élise, cited numerous cases of women to whom the new law seemed a deliverance. But old Mérivet would not agree to it. In his mind divorce meant the destruction of the marriage tie.

"Yes, Madame, and nothing else," he repeated, turning to Mme. Fénigan, who protested. "Formerly, when a man and wife knew that they were bound for life, they made the most comfortable arrangement possible, as if for a long journey; they made mutual concessions, little sacrifices to the hobbies of their travelling companions. One gave way, the other put up with a little inconvenience. To-day, at the first sign of ill-temper, they declare that their dispositions are incompatible. Everything cracks at the slightest jar. No more indulgence, no more patience. And even if their hearts are full of love when they marry, our

young people make this mental reservation: 'If this does n't work, the door is open.'"

"And yet, Monsieur Mérivet, when a poor creature like — like —"

Élise intended to say "like me," but her tears suffocated her. And, being unable to finish her sentence, she gulped down glass after glass of water to restrain her emotion. After a moment of embarrassed silence, during which every one waited for her to speak, Mérivet addressed Richard's mother, in order to discuss the question impersonally:

"This is the advice I would give the poor creature who should find neither happiness nor love in marriage. Instead of obtaining a divorce, think of the Little Parish Church, of the humble chapel without a curé, in whose steeple there are cracks in which the wood-pigeons build their nests. Let her go in just long enough to repeat 'Our Father,' a simple prayer of resignation and renunciation. Therein is the whole secret of happiness." They all knew the good man's harmless mania, and there was a general exchange of smiles around the table which brought the dinner to a close more cheerfully than it had begun.

On the next day, the roads having dried up as far as the forest, Élise and Richard rode out together as usual. They rode through the small forest of Sénart, where narrow roads shaded by oaks cross and recross among old abandoned quarries, commonly called *uzelles*, overrun with bindweed, brambles, and ferns, with pools of rain-water

at the bottom, drinking-places for rabbits and pheasants. Élise suggested that they rest a few moments, and as soon as their horses were tied to the wire fence surrounding the d'Alcantara preserves, and they were seated side by side on the moss in that wilderness of ravines overgrown with underbrush, she began, looking him full in the face:

"I have a serious question to ask you, Richard; your answer will have great influence upon my life, so I trust that it will be perfectly frank and without reservation. What do you think of Monsieur Delcrous? Do you think he would make a good husband?"

It was so entirely different from what Richard expected! He hesitated, took a long time to find words in which to reply, and then the words were idiotic:

"A husband for you?"

"For me. I am tired of living alone. I seem very cheerful to you all. If you knew how often I laugh when I have no inclination for it!"

The saucy air of her little nose, of her mischievous mouth with the mocking curl at the corners, gave the lie to the melancholy of her words; but her accent was sincere and won for her anew her cousin's sympathy. What complications there are in the simplest of mortals! If she had said to him: "Do you love me? May I hope that you will obtain a divorce some day and take me for your wife?" his answer was ready: "I do not love you. I do not propose to marry again."

And yet it required an effort on his part to advise her to marry another.

"Is Delcrous an honest man? Yes, I think so. But so ambitious, and with so little compassion! I remember two years ago when he sentenced the murderer des Meillottes. He rubbed his hands as he mumbled: 'At last we have that fellow's head!' There was a sort of foam of satisfaction on the edge of his lips."

"You frighten me," said Élise, evidently gratified by that indication of antipathy, in which a touch of jealousy could be detected. But as if he wished to deny any such deduction, Richard hastily rejoined:

"Oh! I don't think he would make you unhappy. And yet —"

He paused, ill at ease, uncertain what to say. And the profound silence of the forest around them, a silence made up of quivering and rustling, of the chirping of insects under the moss, and a buzzing in the luminous tree-tops, resembled the silence of their trembling lips, swollen with avowals. Why did he find her so tempting that day in her marine blue riding-habit, which encased her short, plump figure to the pale red line of the neck? Poor Little Red Riding-Hood in the clutches of that pettifogger! Suddenly Richard sprang to his feet, deeply moved: "Wait two days before giving him his answer."

She thought to herself: "It was such a simple matter to do it at once!" and rose as if with regret, very slowly.

Their horses set off at full speed along the so-called diagonal road which crossed the forest in its widest part, through belts of various kinds of trees, firs, elders, birches, oaks, across charcoal-burners' clearings, where, in the thin smoke, could be seen huts of turf and clay surrounded by hens and children, cords upon cords of fire-wood in regular piles, and brushwood piled on wagons. They had galloped thus for half an hour without speaking, carried onward by their desires and their dreams, when, at the end of a long row of beeches, tall and densely leaved, forming an arch overhead, they spied a Louis XV. hunting-box with an arched doorway and enormous windows, in front of which a group of mounted keepers, in blue jackets trimmed with silver lace, seemed to be awaiting Mme. de Pompadour's carriage.

"It's the pheasant house," said Richard to Élise, who had drawn rein from curiosity.

How many memories, and how heart-rending, were awakened by that old building, where, on the first day of the hunting season, Lydie, so pretty and so proud, used to sit at the general-duke's right hand under the tent erected in front of the door. The keepers drew apart respectfully before a very elegant horseman, in a gray suit buttoned to the chin in military fashion, who rode away toward the diagonal road. Richard started in amazement when he saw before him, rejuvenated, sitting firmly in his saddle, the invalid whom he supposed to be glued to his easy-chair at Grosbourg, and who passed close to him without notic-

ing him, his attention being entirely engrossed by Élise.

"Who is that gentleman?" she inquired. But he had no time to reply before a second horseman much younger than the other, in undress dragoon uniform, emerged from the group of guards and galloped away behind the general. That silky moustache, those tawny curls under the forage-cap! Fénigan restrained a cry of surprise and rage. Charley! it was Charley! in the dragoons! Where was Lydie then? Where had he left her? What had become of her? His ears buzzed, the beeches seemed to him to have grown to gigantic size, while Élise seemed far away, making motions and remarks which he did not understand. And then, before she could ask an explanation of that attack of vertigo, she saw him turn his horse's head abruptly and gallop madly away in pursuit of the father and son who had already disappeared in the windings of the long avenue. She overtook him at the Chêne-Prieur, where he had stopped to question a carter of charcoal sitting on his load, whose voice rang out, loud and distinct, in the open air of the clearing.

"Yes, to be sure it's the prince. I know it because he came here hunting Sunday with the Indian and gave our Guillaume a forty-sou piece for cutting down the bushes. As to his 'listing in the dragoons, Foucart's son who drives the dead wagon, and Eugène's boy can tell you more than I can, for they're both of 'em in the same squadron with little Charles *Six*."

"Thanks," said Richard, white as a birch wand. "Let us go home, I am not well," he added in an undertone to his cousin.

All the way to the Château she tried in vain to extort a word from him, but the "poum-poum-poum" he hummed in his beard indicated his inward suffering. Élise thought: "I have wasted my time and trouble," and as soon as they reached home she went up to her room to conceal her tears, while Richard went to find his mother in the kitchen garden.

It was the restful hour, after the intense heat of the day, when the flowers drink and bathe. In the trickling stream of water along the borders, under the slanting, warm caress of the sun, they stood joyously erect; and their brilliant coloring, intensified as the daylight diminished, emphasized the constant antagonism between color and light. Clouds of butterflies streaked the air above the flower beds. The rattling of the watering-pots against the edge of the basins, a brief order from the gardener to one of his assistants, were the only sounds that broke the silent activity of the day's closing hours, when everything was enveloped in fresh perfume-laden air.

"What's the matter?" asked Mme. Fénigan, when she saw her son, evidently intensely excited, enter the conservatory, where she was engaged, pruning-knife in hand, in pruning certain rare shrubs. Instead of replying, he questioned her in his turn:

"So Charlexis has returned?"

"He has been at Melun two months. Enlisted in the dragoons. Did n't you know it?"

"And she? Where is she? What has he done with her?"

"What men do with such women," his mother replied, cutting off a branch with a sharp blow. "When the price of the seduction is paid, they get rid of them."

She spoke so loud that the gardeners could hear her. Richard closed the glass door and rejoined in a harsh voice which his mother did not know:

"Lydie was no seducer, but a victim of your tyranny, a prisoner escaping, as her last letter said. And then, you have no right to insult the woman who bears our name."

Mme. Fénigan's eyes gleamed.

"You should have taken that name away from her a long time ago, as it was in your power to do."

"By a divorce, you mean? — so that I can marry our cousin, who decks herself out with ship's flags. That can never be — never — never!"

"Yes, I understand, you prefer the catechism of the Little Parish Church. Go and ask the hussy's pardon for all the ridicule she has brought upon us; then install her, not at the Pavilion again, but at the Château to — be confined."

But she had no sooner uttered those ominous words than she would have been glad to recall them, at sight of Richard's sudden pallor and the trembling of his lips. She yielded to an impulse of affection and opened her arms, which he roughly pushed away with a fierce gesture.

"*Enceinte!* Why, you told me that she could not have children. Why did you lie? Why did you always lie to me when you mentioned her? Did you hate her very bitterly?"

"She was the torment and the shame of your life. Yes, I detested her. But, never fear, the tone in which you speak to me teaches me a lesson. She shall never be mentioned between us again. Take her back, nurse her, acknowledge the child when it 's born. They agree to settle two hundred thousand francs on it. A good speculation, you see."

Wounded to the quick in her pride, in her passionate maternal affection, she made a pretence of continuing her pruning, punctuating each sentence with a quick slash. But Richard would not have it.

"Beware, mother."

He seized her wrists, turned her violently until she faced him, and, driven to desperation by all that he had learned, put his distorted features close to that old woman's face which was so like his own; then his passion burst its bounds.

"It is you who have been the torment of my life — do you understand? you, not she! Ever since my childhood, which you cooped up in an invalid's room, depriving it of air and motion, your selfish love has prevented me from expanding, from becoming a man. To keep me by your side you tyrannized over me as you tyrannized over my father; you encouraged my indolence and my vices; you closed every possible career to me. In

order to keep me from marrying, so that there should be no other influence here but yours, you drove your servants into my bed. Don't deny it! As if I had n't seen you do it! And this poor little thing whom you sent to Lorient for, — what have you not done, aside from actually throwing her into my arms, to make me take her for my mistress and nothing more than my mistress, for her husband is still living, and the Church does not recognize divorce; but anything, everything, rather than see in our house again the woman whom your despotism drove from it, and of whom you were always jealous! Ah! your jealousy 's a pretty thing, and the Pharisee who guides your conscience is a pretty fellow! But nothing of the sort is possible, nothing; I love my wife, do you understand, I love her and forgive her, for I was culpable toward her in not defending her against you, against your unkindness. Oh! weep, weep! She is weeping more bitterly, for she is alone, abandoned, I know not where. Oh! but I will find her. Rather than continue to lead the life I am living apart from her, with you, I prefer to die, to tear myself to pieces with this."

"Richard, my child!"

He tried to snatch the pruning-knife from her hand, but she was quicker and more adroit than he and threw the heavy tool to the farther end of the conservatory into a wilderness of plants and flowers.

VIII.

"No, you cannot imagine how it fatigues me to have to appeal to my will every moment in the day and for the simplest things — standing up, sitting down, taking off my hat, putting it on again; what to you is an instinctive, automatic movement, necessitates on my part a mighty effort, a summoning of all my reserve strength. To tear myself out of bed in the morning, to eat when I am at table, to finish a sentence which I have been unfortunate enough to begin, — everything becomes a momentous event, a torture to my poor carcass. — Come, let us sit down, the perspiration is standing out on me in great drops just from having walked on your arm as far as this."

The scene was the terrace on the river bank at Grosbourg; time, afternoon. Master Jean, compassionate and resigned behind his spectacles, had been since breakfast leading from one bench to another the lamentations of the Général-Duc d'Alcantara, trying to soothe him with the absent-minded consolations with which we allay the suffering of incurables. "And yet, Monsieur le Duc, you went out in the saddle yesterday, and Charlexis thought that you rode admirably."

"Stuff and nonsense! After driving in the landau with the duchess as far as the pheasant house, the fancy seized me to take a gallop on the head-keeper's mare, which is very gentle. In five minutes I was in the ditch, where the carriage came and picked me up, and very lucky I was not to have left all my bones there. That's how I rode. The fact is that I have no strength whatever, and if I should cease for a moment to say to myself: 'I will live!' why, I should stop living."

The general closed his eyes, his head fell back against the trellis, covered with glycine and red jasmine, behind the bench, and his large, pallid features relaxed with an expression of weariness, of exhaustion. In the park could be heard the calls and strokes of a game of tennis, hidden by a clump of privet bushes, between which white caps and bright-colored skirts passed like lightning flashes. A burst of merriment, more noisy, more triumphant than those that had gone before, roused the invalid from his torpor.

"Do you hear your former pupil playing tennis with all the Esthers and Rebeccas from the Château of Mérogis? Ah! he does n't suffer, not he. How heartily he laughs!"—And suddenly his voice became very stern and threatening: "To me that young rascal is perfectly horrible, he gives me a deathly vertigo. Can you succeed in understanding him?"

"Why, it seems to me"— bleated Master Jean. "I thought he had reformed, returned to the ranks, to his duties."

"Yes, by force. By the way, you don't know the end of the romance. The duchess forbids my speaking of it, because the young man does n't make a very glorious appearance, but I have none of those maternal weaknesses. One morning, that old lascar of an Alexandre, whom we employed to keep an eye on the husband, drops down in the lovers' chamber at Monte-Carlo, — 'He is on my heels, he is here, *sauve qui peut!*' he says, with a quavering voice made to order. The lady takes fright, knowing that her man is slow in getting under way, but violent as a buffalo and with horns as hard. The little one, very spunkily, I am bound to say, refused to turn tail. Alexandre was obliged to take him aside. 'There 's no husband here, it 's all a trick. But you are without a sou, cleaned out by roulette; you have a yacht, a woman and perhaps a kid on your hands, and it is time for you to get out of the scrape. Here is money, off you go on your yacht; I will take the lady off your hands.' — Knowing our lover as you do, you can imagine how joyfully he accepted. An incubus round his neck for three months, damnation! He tore himself weeping from the arms of his beloved, and while Alexandre whisked her away into Bretagne, he, to throw Bluebeard, who was said to be on his way, off the scent, went aboard his yacht and made sail, ostensibly for the little harbor of Morbihan, where his mistress was to wait for him, and where she is still waiting. I fancy that we ourselves should not have seen him for a long

while if his *Red, White and Blue* had not gone to the bottom one night off the Balearic light. He came back to us shamefaced, with an empty purse. A law-suit with the owner of the craft, gratuities to the crew, damages for breach of contract, all these things called for a good deal of money. I took advantage of it to turn the screw and make him enlist in the volunteers. But the incomprehensible, the ghastly feature of the whole thing, is that he has not mentioned or given a thought to the woman who gave him her life and who has been awaiting his pleasure in Bretagne for more than a month."

"What! she does n't know yet?"

"No. Alexandre has had the affair in his hands to adjust and I imagine that he enjoys dragging it out. He's such a vile cur. Here comes the duchess — attention!"

She came from the rear of the terrace, walking rapidly with her tiny steps, her hair and complexion yellower than usual under her dainty garden hat.

"I was looking for you," she said to her husband, speaking very low and very rapidly, and slipping into his hand a letter of which the seal had been broken. "Read what I just found in Charley's mail. The Draveil postmark was what aroused my suspicions."

At first in an undertone, then silently, the general read the challenge addressed to his son by Richard Fénigan in a few words. "I knew that you were a knave, but you will be a dastard, if,

now that you are a soldier — " The long white hands that held the letter trembled feebly.

" Play ! " cried a fresh, manly voice, on the tennis-court. The general, having read the letter, said in a grave tone:

" After yesterday's meeting in the forest, of course we must expect this."

The duchess started back in disgust.

" Is n't all the money I have given already, with all that I am ready to give, enough to satisfy those people? "

" There is something beside money in life, my dear. Moreover, the husband has had nothing. His wife has been taken from him and he is angry; that is natural enough, and I can see no way to avoid Charlexis going out with him."

" Nonsense ! Are you mad? — Have n't I heard you say that Richard Fénigan is a thorough master of the sword as well as of the pistol? "

" What is to be done? Your son is a soldier; he is insulted, he must fight."

" I won't show him this letter."

" He will receive another still more insulting."

" I will go and see his mother."

" His mother will receive you as you received her. No, no, there is only one way to prevent the child's fighting."

" What is that? " demanded the duchess with passionate eagerness.

" For me to go out in his place."

A ray of hope shone in the glance that eyed him sharply, but in a moment she said with a shrug:

"You talk of going out, my poor dear, and you cannot stand upright. No, the simplest plan will be to write to his colonel, our cousin de Boutignan, to recall him at once. I wanted to spare him the grand manœuvres, but in face of this — "

A tennis ball rolled at their feet, and the fragrant curtain of privet branches was thrust aside by the young prince in a white flannel shirt open at the neck, a broad black silk sash around his supple waist, red-cheeked and hair moist with perspiration. He smiled at the duchess's quick movement to conceal the letter.

"You smell of mystery here," he said. And having picked up the ball with a twist of his heavy racket, he disappeared between the branches, leaving behind him a thrill of admiration of his adroit and agile grace. All three had the same thought, which his mother expressed thus:

"Such a jewel! Can you imagine that I will have it disfigured? I will go up at once and write to Boutignan."

The general, being left alone with Jean, sprang to his feet with a sudden burst of energy:

"Let me alone, let me alone, I want to see."

Standing unsteadily, he turned his profile to his companion, with his feet at right angles to each other, and tried to raise his cane, to take aim as if with a weapon, but he staggered, threw up his arms, and would have fallen if the tutor had not caught him and helped him to sit down on the bench.

"Go out in such a condition!" muttered the

poor man, wiping his forehead, which was bathed in perspiration by the effort, and his eyes, in which the tears were gathering. He continued after a pause:

"How well she said that I could not stand on my feet! — How clearly her tone disclosed all a wife's contempt for the husband who can no longer defend her or her children!"

And while he spoke, with his eyes on the ground, they heard in the park the loud laughter and the racket strokes of a merry game.

The prince was still asleep the next morning when the postman brought to Grosbourg a letter bearing the Draveil postmark. Orders had been given to all the servants, so that no letter could reach Charlexis without passing through his mother's hands, and she, after signing the receipt, opened a note from Fénigan more insulting than the first. She mentioned it to no one, and Charlexis being recalled to Melun the same morning by a despatch from his commanding officer, she was feeling much more at ease, when, at breakfast on the following day, another missive arrived from Richard, for the father this time, with a copy of the challenges sent to the young prince: "What has M. le Duc d'Alcantara to say to it? Will he show himself as vile a coward as his son?"

The duchess, sitting opposite her husband, was surprised to see that he did not eat. He could not hold his fork, his fingers trembled so. Instead of answering his wife's questions, he handed her the two letters he had just opened. She ran her

eye over those insults to all her family, and, very calm now that she felt that her son was out of danger, she said: "This is absurd, he knows that you cannot fight."

"He does n't know it. He saw me in the saddle day before yesterday."

"He must have seen you on the ground then, for you did n't stay long in the saddle. At all events, it can be explained. I will send Master Jean to him."

The tutor's spectacles quivered as they did when he fell in with an over-difficult passage for the violoncello.

"You are right," said the general, suddenly consoled.

Unhappy Master Jean! how far away the days seemed when his violoncello used to cross the Seine from one house to the other in Chuchin's boat! And Uzelles, formerly so bright and full of animation, was so dismal and gloomy now, especially since Mme. Fénigan and her son, as the result of a stormy explanation, had ceased to speak to each other or even to meet. Richard had returned to his room in the Pavilion, where his meals were served and where he passed the whole day. Except for the regular, sharp reports of a parlor pistol, no one would have known that he was there. His mother, redoubling her activity and her watchfulness, trotted from the barnyard to the orchard, continued to make life a burden to the gardener and his dormice; and in the harsh tones of her voice, her haughty bearing, the angry

jingle of her keys, could be detected the outcry of her wounded pride, the insult to her maternal affection.

"To think that he prefers that wicked woman to me, after all that I have done for him! — Oh!"

Words failed her in which to express her indignation, especially when she remembered the expression of those feverish, tightly-clenched lips spitting insult and hatred in her face. And that man was her son, her little Richard!

"But you are mistaken, cousin," mildly interposed Élise, who was helping her pick up apples from the ground under the distaff-shaped apple-trees along the paths, "your Richard adores you; he spoke to you in anger, but I am sure that if you would —"

The mother proudly drew herself up, letting the apples fall at her feet.

"Never! you don't know me; I would rather die than humble myself before my son! He is the one who must ask my pardon."

"How do you know that he is n't thinking of it? If you would only let me knock at the door of the Pavilion and try to see him."

The mother smiled pityingly:

"You would waste your time, poor dear, you don't know what to say to him; you are too good a girl."

At heart, she bore her ill-will for her failure. Élise realized it, and forgetting her own disappointment in face of that great sorrow, she felt that she was useless, in the way, and talked of

returning to Lorient, nor could Mme. Fénigan find a word to say to detain her. Richard, for his part, was in the throes of the fiercest of his jealous paroxysms and thought only of avenging himself and killing. Two officers, former chums at Louis-le-Grand, who were in garrison at Villeneuve fort, were ready to act as his seconds, and he was passing his days keeping his hand in practice, watching for the postman and a reply to his challenges, when Master Jean appeared one morning in the study, stammering and confused. The things he saw on entering the room were so extraordinary, the pistol on the table, the targets nicked on the edges and riddled with holes, as well as the things he had to say, the plan he had to suggest! — The general asked nothing better than to take the place of his son, who had gone to take part in the manœuvres, but as the weakness of his legs made it impossible for him to stand, he relied upon the generosity of Fénigan and his seconds to obtain certain concessions.

"Does he want to fight on horseback?" asked Richard in a sneering tone.

"No, but seated. It was d'Elbée, if I mistake not, whom the Blues shot after he was wounded, sitting in an armchair. I have to propose to you a meeting of that sort, at Uzelles or at Grosbourg, in chairs at fifteen or twenty paces.

Richard roughly cut him short.

"That sort of thing's all very well for nurses; you may say to the general that I will wait until his son returns, I prefer that; I will wait a month,

six weeks, as long as need be — but I propose to fight with that young villain, and if nothing can induce him to fight me, I will lie in wait for him at some crossroads in the woods and kill him." He repeated the words several times: "I will kill him! I will kill him!" driving them into Master Jean's feeble brain as with blows of a mallet. So the tutor walked unsteadily through the little gate with the two steps leading to the lane in the forest, where Richard's mother had been waiting for him a few moments. At sight of her the poor man exclaimed idiotically:

"Oh! Madame, it is such a long time — I am very glad — "

But she speedily interrupted him and said, pointing to the Pavilion:

"What did you come here to say to him? What more evil do those Grosbourg people propose to do us?"

"Why, Madame, it is he, Monsieur Richard — it is not we."

Choking with emotion, he told of the letters received at the Château, the duchess's terror.

"I warned her," said Mme. Fénigan, with a proud little laugh: "'Woe to you if our sons meet!'"

A word from Master Jean made her reflect:

"Misfortune is blind, Madame, it may strike you as well as us; I implore you, seek rather to allay the wrath of your son, over whom you have so much influence."

"None at all now, alas! That horrible woman when she went away carried with her my child's

affection and confidence. Would you believe that for three days —"

She checked herself for fear of weeping, which she would not do at any price; tears are weakening, and she needed all her courage, all her pride, to deal with her rebellious child.

Talking together, they left the forest path and walked along the Corbeil road, she bareheaded under her umbrella, as if she were on one of the paths in her orchard. People whom they met, old people of the neighborhood, all in their Sunday best, bowed and turned to look after her in surprise.

"What is going on this morning?" queried Master Jean; "as I came I heard the bell of the Little Parish Church, but this is a week-day."

"One of that old fool's anniversaries, I suppose." And Mme. Fénigan shrugged her shoulders. She bore Mérivet a grudge for the discussion at the last dinner-party, attributing to him Richard's sudden aversion for Élise and divorce. And so, as he came out of his church and passed them, she responded very distantly to the ceremonious salutation addressed to her by the old goodman, who was dressed and gloved in black, in deep mourning for the beloved wife, the twenty-first anniversary of whose death he was observing that day.

"Pardon for all transgressions, remission of all sins, — that is what they preach in there." She pointed with her umbrella to the little white church by the roadside. "And he is very anxious that I

should go in, that I should join his flock. No, thanks! Let my son come here, if he chooses, to the Church of the Good Cuckold" — the phrase was uttered with vehemence — "but I will never step foot in it as long as I live."

"O Madame, Madame Fénigan," sighed the violoncellist, suddenly remembering the message of death with which he was intrusted. "What will become of us if you can do nothing with your son? He means to kill — to kill — "

"Let him begin with his wife then! That will be a good riddance."

"Madame — "

"What! do you too undertake to defend her? What in God's name did the vile creature give you all to drink? Ah! yes, in your case it 's the music, your *duets;* it 's like Richard's 'poum-poum-poum,' — and then that clinging way that passes for gentleness, for weakness; men are so fond of thinking that they are protecting somebody. Ah! if that hussy who caught my son were here, if I had her — "

"You would take pity on her if she were here, Madame, for you are very kind-hearted and she is very unhappy," said Master Jean, winking behind his spectacles as if he expected to be struck by the thunderbolt whose flash gleamed in Mme. Fénigan's glance. But no. With a slight inclination of the head, that haughty person broke off the interview and, hastily turning her back, walked back alone toward Uzelles.

The church gate was still open. What was the

secret of the sudden and contradictory impulse, of the unconscious overturning of all her feelings, which led Mme. Fénigan to ascend the steps? Doubtless old Mérivet's words to the poor disappointed creature: "Enter and kneel, the secret of happiness is there." He had said it with such certainty; and just now again, when the old idiot crossed the road, his face wore such an expression of comfort and relief!

She entered, blinded by the half-darkness after the bright glare without, and glanced haughtily around at the cold high walls, lighted here and there by the reflection of the stained glass windows, all of which were closed save the one at the farther end of the church, a very high, very wide window over the altar, framing a large square of blue sky where doves flew back and forth. Oh! that boundless, alluring sky! Almost without realizing it, she knelt, and the humble prayer recommended by the old man, the "Our Father" lisped by little children, came to her lips, which forgot all the other forms. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them who —" Tears gushed forth in a torrent from the hard rock. It was a relaxation, a lightening of her whole being, in which she saw and judged herself, lived her life anew.

Yes, Richard was right. Pride, a longing for domination had governed and ruined all her acts; yes, her husband and her son, although she loved them dearly, had suffered through her. And perhaps, with a more affectionate mother-in-law, Lydie the orphan would have been happy in her new

home. But she must have been very indulgent to Mme. Fénigan, must have had a pitying and forgiving heart. She realized all that now, and also what still remained for her to do. Something much more difficult; but as God had inspired her, he would doubtless assist her.

"Our Father who art in Heaven —"

A long sigh, not far away, told her that she was not alone in the church. Her eyes, by this time accustomed to the darkness, distinguished a poor woman a few steps in front of her chair, a poor woman in a Savoyard's cap, her garments stained and faded, who was crouching on her knees and praying, a parcel and a black cotton umbrella on the floor by her side. The former Mme. Fénigan, she who just entered the little church, did not like beggars; she considered charity degrading, and never, except on her regular day for almsgiving, the traditional Monday, did she give away a sou or a crust. That was one of the articles of her individual code, a perpetual subject of dispute between her and her daughter-in-law when they went out together in the landau. Ah! if Lydie, in the out-of-the-way corner where the misery of her transgression lay hidden, could have seen her implacable mother-in-law go up to the poor woman and say to her gently: "You are not of this neighborhood?" how great would have been her amazement and her hope! — But the beggar did not reply. Exhausted by fatigue, she had fallen asleep praying, seated, squatting rather on her feet. Far from losing her temper, as she would not have

failed to do formerly, and roughly arousing the creature who appeared before God in such an unseemly posture, Mme. Fénigan felt her heart swell with pity, and, taking from her reticule the purse which lay at the bottom jangling against the bunch of keys, without opening it, without looking to see how much it contained, she placed it on the poor woman's package. To any one who knew Richard's mother, that outbreak of irregular charity would have been even more extraordinary than the new and secret resolutions which she carried away from her visit to the Little Parish Church.

Napoléon Mérivet, who had been walking in his little field of poppies for a few moments, saw her come out, and uttered a joyful exclamation: "You, Madame, was it you? I heard the chairs moving, but I never should have supposed — "

"Indeed, it is a real miracle; but miracles cannot astonish you," she said, with an effusive smile. She added, as she opened her parasol to the hot midday sun:

"Monsieur Mérivet, I have a favor to ask of you. I am obliged to go away for a few days, and I am much distressed at the necessity of leaving Richard alone, especially under such cruel circumstances."

The old man smiled mischievously under his thick, moustache-like eyebrows.

"You are not leaving him alone — what about the cousin?"

"The cousin is returning to Bretagne and I am going with her."

"You, going to Bretagne? What for?"

"I don't know yet. An inspiration that just came to me in the church."

Without asking any further questions, the old man said to her with impulsive enthusiasm:

"Ah! I knew very well that you were an excellent, noble-hearted woman, and that there was nothing but your infernal pride —"

"Remember, Monsieur Mérivet, that, so far as my son or anybody else knows, I am going home with Élise, nothing more; otherwise Richard might form some wild hopes — I wish to see for myself first."

"Your son shall know nothing, hope nothing, until you choose, Madame. In your absence I will keep my eye on him and the people at Grosbourg; and if I do not feel strong enough myself to prevent great follies, I have my good Cérès at hand, who has Saint François's gentleness combined with his arch-angelic grip. I will answer for your child."

"Thanks," said Mme. Fénigan, deeply moved. She was about to walk away, but detained the old man as he started to close his little church.

"Look out, there is still somebody there, a poor woman who fell asleep praying."

Little Napoléon raised his head proudly.

"It is the church of the high road. As soon as the door is opened, misery in some form always comes along, enters and seeks shelter. Let us not wake her, I will close the door later. Is there anybody else there with this poor woman?"

"Yes, some one whom I left in a corner and whom we must leave there forever — my pride, my infernal pride," said Mme. Fénigan, smiling happily, and in no wise resembling the arrogant individual who had entered the Little Parish Church a few moments before.

IX.

AFTER a wild journey across France, a panting, zigzag journey under the guidance of M. Alexandre, with irregular halts, détours, varied precautions, romantic disguises, the Comtesse Lydie, or the Countess simply, accompanied by her mahout and her lady's-maid, landed one September evening at the Princesse de Lamballe hotel at Quiberon. Low ceilings, dripping with moisture, a stifling canopy over a worm-eaten boat bed, caused her to pass a weary, sleepless night; and when the angelus rang in the morning and her little round window was opened upon a hazy sky, the little gray square in front of the Roman church with the squat doorway, and divers old Bretons talking in the mist with grunting noises like seals, left a feeling of oppression at her heart, a sort of presentiment of the trick they were playing upon her.

That disheartening impression lasted all the morning, until the return of M. Alexandre, who had gone to look up the Blanchard family, his family, whom, after forty years of oblivion, he suddenly remembered one morning at Monte Carlo, when he was trying to think of a place of refuge for the hunted lovers. As the clock struck

twelve he returned radiant. All the Blanchards of his childhood, great and small, were sleeping in the little Quiberon cemetery, facing the Mer-Sauvage, whose waves come straight from the Azores in three bounds; all the Blanchards, save one uncle, the captain of an Indiaman, who was always away, and his wife who lived all alone in a little yellow house on the beach at Port-Haliguen.

"My aunt Maison-Jaune,"[1] so baptized by Alexandre, agreed to let her house all furnished to Mme. la Comtesse, to do her cooking as well as M. le Comte's when he was there, and also to furnish the carriage which was to come after breakfast to fetch Madame Lydie, her luggage and her lady's-maid, — all upon the most moderate terms, to say nothing of the agreement to keep a look-out for the *Red, White and Blue*, when she should enter the harbor with all sail set and lie to almost abreast of the house.

The village of Quiberon, situated in the centre of the peninsula, has two harbors; one very near, Port-Maria on the Mer-Sauvage, the other on the Morbihan (little sea), Port-Haliguen, which lies a league away, beyond a network of narrow lanes and low walls, calcined by the salt air, surrounding farms, orchards, typical ambuscades of Blues and Chouans.

When Lydie reached the peaceful little place, consisting of one long line of houses, with its signal tower of white masonry at the end of the jetty, its wharves belonging to foreign companies, lined by

[1] Yellow-House.

low buildings, sailors' wine-shops, sheds and warehouses, the mist had scattered and with it had vanished the dismal depression of the morning. The sea shone like gold in a soft light, and Port Navallo and Saint-Gildas stood out distinctly on the sinuous line of the horizon; the calmness of the water was in striking contrast to the cannonade of the Mer-Sauvage on the reefs, which could be heard night and day on the other side of the peninsula. The yellow house shone resplendent, alone upon the beach, at the entrance to the harbor, and, even more brilliant than its ochre walls, the winged cap of Aunt Blanchard, who had been at work since dawn scrubbing her floor and her mahogany furniture in preparation for her tenants.

A most suitable refuge for an adventurous wanderer was that dwelling, on a level with the ground and close to the sea, wherein shells, corals, marine plants, curios from India and China, scattered about on walls, mantels and furniture, told of travels and foreign skies, where that sea which she loved so well, and with a passionate longing always repressed, broke beneath her windows, was reflected quiveringly in all the mirrors, with the sails of the fishing boats going in and out at regular hours like flocks of white sea-gulls. But what loneliness, and what painful privations for the young woman's vain and luxurious tastes! The light of La Teignouse, lighted every evening in the lilac mists of twilight, did not replace the chandelier of the dining-room at Monte-Carlo, at the supper hour, when Lydie sailed in on M. le Comte's

arm. So, too, on that desert of sand of melancholy aspect, which History magnifies and makes solemn with tragic memories of the emigration, the few families of bathers from Auray or Vannes, frolicking in provincial fashion in the sunlight, reminded the countess only very vaguely of the Swedish and Hungarian admirers, Russians short and tall, who thronged eagerly about her fine dresses in the enchanted garden of the gaming-house. Here, this foreigner, being alone and too beautiful, kept people at a distance; they waited, before speaking to her or passing judgment on her, until they had seen the count, who was to come in his yacht and join her. When? No one knew. The movements of sailing vessels are so uncertain.

At the outset she was not greatly bored. The unfamiliar country, the getting settled, the fear of seeing the dreaded husband appear; and then M. Alexandre, who was still quartered at the Lamballe at Quiberon, came to see her every morning and to receive her orders. When he appeared, tall and stiff as a ramrod, in the yard of the yellow house, in front of the parlor window at which the Lyonnais lady's-maid was sewing with the Blanchard woman, his old mephistophelian face freshly shaven and covered with blotches, beneath a coquettish watering-place hat, his harlequin's eyes with their revolving pupils sent terror to the heart of Rosine's successor.

"Is Madame sure of him?" she asked her mistress. "For my part, when he looks me full in

the eye and asks me like this: 'Agarithe, are you close-mouthed?' without ever a word more, I always tremble for fear I am going to have some horrible thing told me in confidence."

But her mistress reassured her:

"I have known Alexandre ever since I was a child."

And in truth, in the days when she was at the orphanage at Soisy, he was to her one of the characters of the high road, of the fanciful game of goose with which her little girl's eyes amused themselves. Such early impressions make so deep a mark on the mind, that even at that late day M. Alexandre was an imposing figure to her. Ah! if she could have read that savage little freedman's face, with the neck swollen with venomous hatred for the foundling, the little gypsy who had become the wife of a respectable bourgeois and a Madame! If only the letter of that pandar with the death's head had fallen into her hands, in which he described to the duchess his arrival in their bedroom at Monte-Carlo. — "The husband! Fly!"

To take genuine pleasure in these villanous schemes, one must have been a servant, one must have the fiendish cruelty of the half-breed soured and imbittered in thirty years of menial services, for which he was revenging himself, with pure delight, on a lady, a white woman. For M. Alexandre was not working for money alone. He did not stay on at Quiberon simply to take care of the accounts, but also for the pleasure of watching his victim, of announcing to her that she was

cast off, — as he said in refined language, "of putting that in her hand." From day to day that happy moment drew nearer. Once, however, he had a disagreeable surprise, feared an unforeseen dénouement.

"Look, Alexandre, out by the signal-tower," cried Lydie from the ground-floor of the yellow house, shading her eyes with her hand, "does n't that look like Charlexis' boat?"

A cynical, silent laugh distorted the smooth face.

"That would rather surprise me," muttered the ex-flunkey, looking complacently toward the jetty, and soon fixing his eyes with some anxiety on the signalled vessel, which presented a perfect resemblance to the *Red, White and Blue* in build, sail-plan and dimensions. A stranger certainly, for she had the pilot on board, his skiff towing behind. Probably English, in the judgment of certain old fishermen, light-house keepers and customs officers, the only inhabitants of Port-Haliguen at that time of day, who had gone out to the point where the yellow house stood, to obtain a better view of the schooner. On each new tack the resemblance became more striking; and for an instant Lydie even thought that she recognized on the sunny deck, wet with spray, worthy Nuitt's massive figure and his collar of red beard.

"It is — on my word it is!" muttered M. Alexandre, completely nonplussed; and he added, in a lower tone, just for his cravat to hear: "A deuce of a mess!" — As if you could form any serious,

consistent plan with scatterbrains like that little Charlexis! It must be his fancy for the countess pricking him again. Ah! she was a lucky beggar! And what would the masters at Grosbourg say? And his bonus for the rupture, for the secret birth, for all the rest of the fishing in muddy water, — how could he replace that? Already planning new combinations, M. Alexandre, in order to be the first to greet his young master, walked out toward the signal tower, where Lydie overtook him, with her hair arranged as Charley preferred it, and in his favorite dress, pink and white under the twofold tan of sea-breeze and sun, like a wild carnation, a carnation of the sand dunes.

Almost at the same moment the schooner, beating against a fresh breeze, came about within a few rods of the jetty, and as she stood away on the other tack showed her name in great letters on her stern: AMPHITRITE, CARDIFF. It was a trading vessel, built in the same yard as the *Red, White and Blue*, but of greater tonnage, loaded with *tourteaux*, and with none of the luxuries and comforts of a pleasure yacht.

"I was saying to myself that he has come too soon, much too soon."

And the monster Alexandre, watching the young woman's refined face, took the keenest delight in following the nervous contractions of her disappointment. Ten minutes later the *Amphitrite* entered the silent little harbor, which she filled with her glistening white hull and the creaking of her rigging, mingled with the noisy clamor of a dispute

between the captain and the pilot. Their voices echoed against the stones of the jetty; but no one at Port-Haliguen knew English, and the altercation would never have come to an end, had not Lydie, remembering her lessons from Sister Martha the Irishwoman, offered to act as interpreter.

An interesting subject for a modern picture, that fashionable Parisian seated on a coil of rope in the middle of the deck, amid the odor of tar and *tourteaux;* the Englishman in front of her, a red-bearded apoplectic giant, jabbering with the little Breton pilot, dark, hairy and ape-like, while the sailors, pulling on the yards, gazed in stupid amazement at the deserted wharf above their heads and the few low houses, as if alarmed to find themselves there. The trouble was this: in the tumult of waves and breakers, Madec the pilot had shouted: "Port-Maria," and the captain had understood him to say "Port-Lorient" and had taken Madec on board as the *Amphitrite* was bound for Lorient. As the wind made it impossible to enter Port-Maria, the pilot had run in on the other side of the peninsula, in the little inlet of Port-Haliguen, which bears little resemblance to the spacious and noisy roadstead where the Englishman expected to drop his anchor. Luckily the interpreter's sweet voice, her pretty dress, her sapphire eyes, speedily brought about an agreement; but then she had to defend herself against the generous impulses of the captain, who, being deeply impressed by that Shakespearian apparition, offered one after another to the seductive Miranda who had alighted on the

deck of his schooner, a flask of old port, a marine glass, a pair of cotton drawers, a tomahawk, Javanese slippers, a two-handed Japanese sword, and finally induced her to accept a little American revolver, a *bull-dog*, which the self-assertive mariner carried all loaded in his pocket as a decisive argument against pilots, coast-guardsmen and other commissioned sea-lawyers.

M. Alexandre had hardly recovered from this shock when he had to endure another much more violent. On opening his *Petit Journal* in the hotel restaurant, he read the following among the news items:

"On the night of September 27—28, the yacht *Red, White and Blue*, chartered by the Prince d'Olmütz, collided with a Spanish torpedo-boat off the Balearic Isles and sank instantly. Only the prince and the steward, who were miraculously picked up by a small craft from Port-Mahon with a cargo of oranges for Marseille, were landed at that city."

"What was he going to the Balearic Isles for?" were Lydie's first words on learning the sad news, which he made known to her without any warning. "They are not on the route from Monaco to Quiberon."

"Oh! sailing vessels, you know — a northerly or northwesterly gale, perhaps," said the old servant with a sneering contraction of all his little wrinkles. And he offered at once to go and seek information in the neighborhood of Grosbourg, where the young prince would not fail to go for

supplies. He was ready, of course, to do whatever Madame la Comtesse wished, having been placed at her service by his master's son. And servile protestations and contortions of the spine, all the tricks and wiles of the servants' quarters, all the grimaces of his former trade.

"That is right, go and see," said Lydie, still trustful but more pensive than ever. In the moral darkness in which most human beings flutter aimlessly about, certain facts enlighten them suddenly, throwing a bright light into the lowest depths of the abysses. The startling item in the *Petit Journal* brought to the young woman one of these revelations. If Charlexis had died, what would become of her? As she was incapable of any thought of money, the prospect of poverty did not terrify her. Whence came then the sudden terror with which that idea of death had frozen her blood? Simply from the fact that she had felt almost as indifferent to her lover's disappearance as to that of any other familiar face. Did she not love him then? Well, no. Hitherto she had been in doubt; now the proof was before her. She had followed him from vanity, ennui and weariness, a longing for new scenes and unlooked-for experiences. But even in their most private relations, something always kept them apart, two instead of one, something cold and impenetrable which enveloped her as with a fine coat of mail impervious to attack, protecting her from all the wounds he inflicted, making that duel without seconds, which love is, in this instance unequal and

cowardly. Several times she had had a thrill of fear at his side, caused by certain of his smiles, by his father's words, which haunted her: "He is a monster — I tell you he is a monster." And the picture of the general in his despair, his glowing, honest eyes so different from Charlexis', helped materially to belittle in the young woman's heart the lover for whom she had left everything. Ah! if it were to be done over again. When life was opened before her, a straight, plain road, by her unhoped-for marriage with a worthy man, why plunge into the cross-road madly, without passion, without enjoyment? Now where was she going? How would it all end?

She was brooding over that question, nervous and uncertain, in the mist of the approaching evening, amid the whispering of the waves splashing against the stones of the jetty. Sails returning to the harbor, magnified by the mist, glided by like phantoms. Suddenly, at the end of the pier over which the darkness was gathering a light shone out, high in air and gleaming brightly, the lamp in the signal-tower. At the same moment Lydie felt a commotion within her, a shock inexplicable at first, but which, when it was repeated and understood, filled her with ineffable joy. The child, their child, which she had forgotten, and which manifested its presence for the first time. The change that followed was magical; life appeared to her illumined by a definite purpose, a protecting light. The father himself assumed a more agreeable form in her thoughts, seemed less

obscure, less far away. The harbor was filled with shouts and songs. Oars fell noisily in the boats; and, all along the pier, through the low doors of the houses, where red lights gleamed through the mist, she could hear the green wood snapping and crackling and the laughter of the little children around the hearth.

A week passed without news. Lydie was not alarmed, feeling sure that the prince, after returning to Grosbourg, would have much difficulty in escaping a second time. Every morning the bathers on the beach decreased in number, the yellow house became more solitary. Notwithstanding the exceptional mildness of the season, one felt by the persistency of the mists, by the old gold tinge of the light at certain hours, as well as by the long plaintive wailing of the wind and by the frantic flight of the sea-gulls, that the summer was nearing its end. And on the other side of the peninsula, the roaring of the Mer-Sauvage increased in violence and every wave broke on the rocks with the crash of a battery of artillery.

"Suppose you have to listen to that in winter! it's terrible, they say," said Lydie's maid Agarithe, who, as she passed the whole day sewing with Aunt Yellow-House, knew the whole country thoroughly, and shivered at the thought of a possible wintering in that solitude. "That place they call the *Prompter's Hole*, that rock that whistles and snores behind Port-Maria, makes such a noise when November comes that the people can't sleep.

On this side the sea is n't so wild, but the men here make up for its lack of bad temper."

And the Lyonnaise girl told her mistress about the battles fought at Port-Haliguen between the sardine fishermen and the pirates from Concarneau who came to fish in the same waters. In the cloudy winter days, laden with fog and with an endless downpour of rain, when the lamps are kept lighted night and day and the heavy weather prevents the vessels from going out, one must see, to appreciate the horror of it, two or three hundred sailors in that little port drowned in rain and spray, drunk and howling, rush to assault the Le Buez or Le Quellec tavern which has refused to sell them drink; and when they are driven back with handspikes or kettles of boiling water, turn their rage against one another, and grapple and fight with such fury that they roll from the terrace of Le Buez down on the muck-strewn pier, and from the pier into the harbor, in bunches, without releasing their hold.

"Never fear, my girl, we shall be gone before any of those horrible things happen," replied Lydie, who was much attached to her maid whom she had picked up on a wharf at Lyon, a soft, foolish creature, but the only face on which she could read any other sentiment than distrust or antipathy. M. Alexandre, before his departure, had whispered in Aunt Blanchard's ear that her tenant was only a left-handed countess, and there was not a pebble on the road between Port-Haliguen and Quiberon, which had not picked up the calumny, to

pass it on, fouler than before, to its next neighbor. Hence the malevolence which the deserted creature felt rising before her, cracking under her feet at every step. Her pride suffered, but not overmuch now that the child was there, that it began to fill a larger place in her life. Indeed she hardly ever went out. A piano which had been left at Ploërmel by some Scotch amateurs, and of which she had obtained possession, kept her in the house, scattering its harmonies abroad according to the direction of the wind, either toward the silent, echoing harbor or toward the beach which became more deserted and of greater extent day by day.

On the vast stretch of sand where Sombreuil's Chouans fell, two or three bathing-machines were still standing, belonging to enthusiasts who were awaiting the arrival of the fleet and its experiments in the way of night engagements. To avoid the malicious and envious glances, the spiteful smiles, which she remembered at night as if she found splashes of mud on the hem of her dress, Lydie never went in that direction. The jetty was her favorite walk, especially since she no longer had to watch for the yacht, to scan the horizon with the hope, always disappointed, of descrying a schooner's sails. And yet it began to seem strange to her that Charlexis had not written, or even Alexandre. At last, on the first Sunday in October, the day of the Quiberon fête and regatta, a letter arrived, but not the one she expected.

On that day for the first time Lydie had been able to pass an hour on the water without the hor-

rible spasms of the stomach which made the shortest sea-voyage impossible for her; to be sure, the boat did not move — it was the pilot boat used as a stake-boat for the yachts to turn — and moreover it was a perfect day, blue and soft, the Morbihan, motionless and smooth, without a wrinkle, giving no sign of life save the sparkling reflection of a summer sun that had strayed into the autumn.

"Come with me, Madame la Comtesse," the pilot had said — he had remained her good friend ever since the *Amphitrite* arbitration — "I give you my word that you 'll have a better place to see than you would on the platform of the sub-prefect and the naval commissioner."

And they had been waiting for more than an hour, far out in the broad bay, lost between sky and sea, in a crystalline atmosphere, a soft, reflected warmth which kept one mute, in an ecstasy, as if one were soaring through space. Lydie had never felt so near heaven. Oh! to press a loved hand, in that divine peace, that cradled respite from suffering. "But we can see nothing," murmured Agarithe. It was a curious fact that, although they were too far from the shore to see its thin dark line, the glaring, resonant surface of the water brought to their ears in puffs, in whiffs, all the noises of the fête at Port-Haliguen, bells, shouts, the droning of a bagpipe, the clamor of drums and trumpets. They could see nothing and heard everything. Some one near the bow of the boat said in a low tone: "It seems as if the sounds came from the sky." Suddenly the report

of a signal gun rang out, followed by tumultuous shouts in which the shrill cries of children could be distinguished. Then a silence.

"Here they come!" cried the pilot, rising. The racing yachts were coming toward them in a long line, the leaders almost side by side. Where did they get the breeze that filled their sails, stretched their rigging, made their stanch timbers creak and groan, and gave to their onward rush that mighty breath as of the bellows of a forge, which one could hear coming on before them? Their lofty wings, as of huge white and red birds, were no sooner distinct against the blue than they were there, turning the pilot-boat which saluted them with cheers, and shaving her so close that her jibboom was carried away and broken in a thousand pieces, and she whirled about with a cracking, tearing noise, a medley of loose ropes, shrieking women and cursing sailors. In a flash Lydie saw the Concarneau who had dealt the blow tack and rush away, a phantom vessel with a brown sail, manned by a crew of pirates as pale as the cheap brandy with which they were saturated, wild-eyed, with their dripping hair plastered over faces like those of drowned men. The American boat which came next, a trim pleasure yacht with a silver-gray hull, made her heart beat fast, her crew so strongly resembled honest Nuitt's neatly-clad sailors; and when the gentleman who held the tiller, a tall New Yorker with spectacles, less dandified to be sure than Charlexis, saluted her as he rounded the stake-boat, her lovely pearly eyes filled with tears.

All the pleasure of the race was at an end for her. Pirates and sardine boats, fishermen from Noirmoutiers and the island of Houat, hove in sight, whirled about and were off again at full speed; she watched them with a vague glance, like a flock of sea-mews or cliff-swallows, thinking of the absent one, of him who had made her a mother. For her love, her pitiful simulacrum of love, hardly went farther than this: the feeling of responsibility and the first motherly yearnings stirring in their deep-seated source. When she returned home, nothing could divert her mind from that cherished thought. The wharves at Port-Haliguen, swarming with a picturesque throng, the sailors' hornpipes, solemn but comical, the naval commissioner, belaced like a Peruvian general, seated at a little table in front of the Quellec inn to distribute the regatta prizes; and the bagpipe competitions, the swimming matches in the basin, behind ducks and shotes — she refused to look at any of these things but allowed her maid to go about alone. Agarithe, however, after dark, having borrowed from Mme. Blanchard a great ship's lantern very useful among the narrow labyrinthine paths, succeeded in inducing her mistress to go with her to the village to see the dances.

A keen northerly wind was blowing and the sky sparkled with stars; but in the outskirts of the village the air was hot with the emanations from men and beasts, huddled together in the narrow lanes soft with dung, and on the public square which was surrounded by an inextricable circle of

unharnessed vehicles. That was where they were dancing, "with only mouth music, because the bagpipes were too drunk," an ingenuous damsel lost under a huge white cap observed in reply to a question from Lydie. The crowd was thickest around two or three round dances, of which the most elaborate was being performed under the windows of the Princesse de Lamballe. A waiter, recognizing Agarithe, succeeded, not without difficulty, in piloting them to the front row of spectators, where the great lantern was placed at their feet in the double circle of lamps of various kinds which formed a reddish, smoky row of footlights for the dance. The square was lighted by several similar lights and also by the torches of all the carrioles, wagons, chaises, berlins and diligences which had brought the people from the farms, hamlets and private estates in the neighborhood, and which formed in the half-darkness an irregular, shifting circular platform crowded with gesticulating silhouettes.

J'aime bien les cotillons rouges,
J'aime mieux
Les cotillons bleus.

Local ballads sung by hoarse, shrill voices of fishermen and their wives, accompanied by the rhythmical stamping of heavy shoes, furnished music for the dance, and from that black and white maelstrom of coarse cloth, of steaming woollens, from that wild laughter and those panting breaths arose a dense mist mingled with the dust raised

by the stamping, with the smoke from pipes and lamps.

Sometimes a brightly lighted section of the scenery disappeared, leaving a whole corner of the festival in darkness; a carriole or a diligence had driven away, carrying its lanterns, and its songs, which died away in the labyrinth of lanes:

Les cotillons rouges,
Les cotillons bleus,
Ce sont les bleus
Que j'aime le mieux.

Little by little the square became almost dark. The dances, greatly reduced in number and finally blended in a single one, were lighted only by lamps almost burned out and by the stars which began to be visible just as the braying of the Mer-Sauvage suddenly seemed to have come much nearer. It droned the bass of a wild ballad which the singers had just attacked at a breakneck pace:

Fendons le bois,
Le roi!
Chauffons le four,
L'Amour!

The heavy skirts flapped, the voices pushed and jostled each other breathlessly; in the dark corner of the square the wind sang and danced alone. "Let us go back," murmured Lydie, with the same strange feeling of oppression at her heart which had attacked her on the morning of their arrival, up at that hotel window. Agarithe picked up the lantern and they returned through the nar-

row Chouan paths, where prowling shadows crept along the walls, where drunkards, who had fallen heavily into the ditches, lay sleeping there between a hiccough and the refrain of a ballad:

Chauffons le four,
L'Amour!
Dormez, la belle,
Il n'est point jour.

The farm dogs barked as they passed, making them quicken their pace and lower their voices.

"Look, look, Madame, at those lights over yonder on the water, between the branches of the sorb tree; I should think it was the fleet."

Oh! that fleet! Agarithe dreamed of it, and all Quiberon with her. The Lamballe was full of guests, people from Port-Navallo, Vannes, Nantes, even from Paris, who had come to witness or take part in the manœuvres. The waiter, who was a friend of Agarithe, had mentioned to her a Parisian lady who was accompanied by her cousin, a pretty, plump little creature.

"Did he tell you what the lady's name was?" asked Lydie, disturbed by a strange coincidence. For she had fancied that she recognized, during the singing, the figure of a woman leaning against the balcony of the hotel, bareheaded, with a haughty carriage; the living picture of her mother-in-law. But Agarithe did not know the names. And then Mme. Fénigan's presence at Quiberon was so hard to understand. Evidently it was one of those apparitions of a waking dream, of the sort evoked by fixing one's thoughts for a

long while on the same point. All day long Lydie had been questioning the past, why should she be surprised that it had answered her with one of its phantoms? It was something like the hallucination of her Lyonnaise maid, who, by dint of hearing the fleet talked about, fancied that she saw its signals gleaming in all quarters of the horizon. And yet, when they reached Port-Haliguen, with the shadowy immensity of the ocean before their eyes, they could see no other light than that in the signal tower, and one, nearer at hand, waiting for them on the ground floor of the yellow house, the only house on the beach.

Under that lamp a letter was conspicuously placed, which Lydie opened at once and which explained at last the horrible suffering of her first hours in that country, the strange feeling of discomfort with which she had been seized again that same evening, as a warning that her cruel destiny was to strike her down there, upon that beach, and not elsewhere. Oh! the intuition of woman, the prescience, the subtle clairvoyance that resides in her every nerve; — what are our keen powers of observation beside that? She vaguely deciphered Mr. Alexandre's epistle. It was long, it was awkward and floundering, and a lie from one end to the other, written in a scrawling, flunkey's hand which her eyes ran over in alarm, noticing certain words by the way: "he had to submit — volunteer service — dragoons — money at the notary's — to go to the child at her death." The sum and substance of the letter was this: "It is all over;

he casts you off. Prepare your bill; I am coming to settle it and write you beforehand in order to avoid all discussion."

She knew perfectly well that it would end at some time; and she had decided, too, what she would do when she came to the end of that no-thoroughfare. But, why so hastily? Why in such a villainous way? — Not even to write her a word, the tearful farewell that prefaces a rupture! to leave that office to a servant! — That surpassed the vilest infamy. Gradually, one fact casting light upon another, she discovered the atrocious farce they had been playing with her since Monte Carlo, their tragic parting, her absurd flight across France, and the refined villainy of taking her so far away, of making her wait so long before hurling that insult in her face. — O Charley; that was what your undecipherable laugh meant and those cold, stony eyes that frightened her so. "A handsome monster," as his father had said, a monster incapable of loving, who instinctively repelled all intimacy and all tenderness. Their degrading, loveless romance ended as it was sure to end. And those Grosbourg people with their notary — for what did they take her, in God's name? What, the general too? Oh! that outraged her more than all the rest,— the idea that that proud, intrepid creature whose despairing passion had sometimes touched her, could believe that she had a trafficking, money-seeking heart! They would soon see how much she cared for their money and all the rest.

"To go to the child!" Ah! yes; to be sure — the child. In making the firm resolution that dated from the first day, not to survive the end of her mad freak, she had not foreseen this irony of fate, this haphazard motherhood at the end of eight years of sterile wedlock. But how was she to rear the child? No father, no name, not even its mother's name, for she had never had one. Black poverty and a prince's blood in its veins. What would become of the child, unclassed, abandoned? Would it not be a hundred times better to carry it to death with her?

Death, assuredly, yes. But what form of death? To leave the world quickly, to escape from her melancholy existence, but through what door? The sea was there, close at hand, at the foot of the rocks. She had but to open the window softly and climb over the sill — only two steps to take. The darkness of the night and the water frightened her. She must put on her clothes and shoes, or else go out half naked. Ah! there 's the very thing. As she glanced around the room, her eye fell on the Englishman's little revolver, gleaming on the mantel. Standing straight before the mirror, she handled it for a moment with skilful fingers, thinking of a multitude of persons and things, the long procession of the last hour already passing before her haggard eyes; and as she put aside the lace trimming of her chemise, to aim at the right place, the consciousness of her beauty stayed her hand, she almost regretted marring that pearly whiteness, on which glistened a little gold locket. A brief

mental prayer to Our Lady of Fourvières, her finger on the trigger, and she was about to fire. A succession of rapid blows on the partition and Agarithe's voice checked her again: — "Madame! Madame! Oh! how lovely it is! — all those green, blue, yellow and red lights dancing over the water! Here it is! here it is! it's the fleet — what did I tell you?"

She instinctively turned her head toward the window, the panes of which were vibrating with the shock of a tremendous cannonade, in which the sharp, fierce bark of the little bull-dog was completely drowned. As Lydie turned, one of the long electric search-lights carried by vessels on the coast flooded every corner of the room with its bluish glare. She received it full in the face and might well have believed that eternity was opening before her. After the agony of the tempestuous passage is passed, perhaps it is like that when one dies.

X.

THE PRINCE'S JOURNAL.

BETWEEN two battles, suffering like a vanquished general who is beginning to get used to it, for we are the white *manchons*,[1] I am writing to you from an old mill, the headquarters of our army. I thought, as I told you in my last letter from Grosbourg, that I had gotten rid of this absurd grind of the grand manœuvres, and I was beginning a delicious flirtation with two little Jewesses of the neighborhood, sisters, one recently married, the other on the eve of being; they were already biting very prettily — I used only one hook and the same cherry for the two — when a despatch from my cousin de Boutignan compelled me to resume my place on the staff at once. "Superior orders!" said my old fool of a colonel, winking the only eye he has left; and I could n't find out anything more, for de Boutignan, holding his commission through influence, is always afraid of compromising himself. My little finger warns me, however, that this time again the general-duke, my father, has played some scurvy trick on me. Perhaps he found that

[1] A *manchon* in this sense is a strip of white material worn by the troops on one side in a sham battle, so that they may be readily distinguished from the others.

my presence at Grosbourg scattered too much youth and merriment around his invalid's chair. You know that, after a very marked improvement, he suddenly fell back again several steps. The doctors attributed that relapse to a fall from his horse; but I was there,—I saw him slip from the saddle because he had a fresh attack of apoplexy. So that I attribute his illness to a totally different cause. He was fond of Madame F——, and I am sure that he cherished a vague hope of putting his hand upon her. The news of her suicide must have given him a rude shock. Yes, my dear fellow, the unhappy woman, on learning that I had abandoned her, sent a bullet through her heart, or something of that sort. She was dying a week ago; since then I have heard nothing. But imagine the emotion of M. Alexandre, who had it in charge to settle the financial part of the rupture with her, when he was received at that deathbed by —guess whom? The husband's mother, Mme. F——'s own mother-in-law! How did she come there? The two women hated each other. Was the husband in the house too? All that I know is that they threw Master Alexandre's offers of money in his face, a result not likely to displease Mme. la Duchesse; and my father wrote me, on the subject of that suicide, a letter as tomb-like and sentimental as a waltz of 1845.

My love fatal to that ingenuous creature? I don't believe a word of it. She killed herself from spite, ennui, because she was at a loss to know how to defy the dismal outlook of existence.

With ten years more on my shoulders I feel that I shall be capable of doing quite as much and on a slighter pretext, especially if those ten years resemble the few weeks I have passed with the regiment. Not that the work tires me; as the colonel's cousin and private secretary, as the son of my papa, himself a prince, I am relieved from all service and can yawn all day on my bed, in the room I have hired, looking out on the finest view in Melun. But Melun, and its people — What to do? where to go? with whom? The officers I meet at the mess, when my cousin de Boutignan invites me there, talk like school-boys. For the most part they are little more than that. Shut up for ten years in a college yard or at a convent, they leave only to enter at Saint-Cyr or Saumur, and from there go to the barracks — hardly a change of prison. They know nothing of life, laugh and joke about their former teachers and have the same "laugh for the colonel" which used to be their "laugh for the professor" — the stamp of childishness and cowardice. Aside from a few ambitious fellows, who dig and grind by lamplight, little Bonapartes without a star, *en route* for the Élysée or the post of Satory, they think of nothing but cutting drills and lectures, running off to Paris and going on a spree. They have plenty of anecdotes, incidents of college or garrison life. Very few have seen actual war. After dinner, some of them, with smoking moustaches, tell of terrible adventures bristling with oaths, and where it happened! and where they received it! — not an inch of their

cloaks that was not riddled and covered — and their beasts did n't flinch, I assure you, nor the other beasts that rode them. Then, on listening more closely, you find that it is not a battle they are talking about, but a hard shower that caught them on a New Year's Day or a Fourteenth of July, when they were ordered out to act as escort for the president of the Senate or the Corps Législatif. They have no other campaigns to talk about, and they regret it. So do I, for I ask myself whether all these gentlemen, who are so excellently adapted for escort or parade duty, are really warriors, and how they would act on a battlefield. Brave, bless my soul! Why, every Frenchman who feels that he is being stared at is brave. But are they determined, are they capable of spontaneous, clear-headed action under fire? That is to be seen. One must have been face to face with death to warrant his self-possession if disturbed by the time and the circumstances. My father used to tell me that, one day in the Crimea, he had carried a despatch from Marshal Bosquet, whose aide-de-camp he was, to a detachment of rifles, and that when he was on the point of leaving their warm and perfectly secure shelter and starting to return through the showers of grape, he suddenly became conscious of a heavy, inert feeling in his legs, and rose — with the greatest difficulty — simply because of the keen, mocking glances of the rifles, who thought that *he was waiting a little too long*. Those few moments of funk he reckoned the most fiendish moments in his

whole life. He also told me of one of his chums, a major in the Chasseurs d'Afrique, who was well-known in the army for the horrible attack of diarrhœa he had whenever the bugles sounded the charge. He carried a flask of pure absinthe in his holsters, which he would pour down at a gulp, and rush in with that in his head, unable to fight unless he was half drunk.

Ah! these horrible nerves, which danger entangles and excites to frenzy in some, which it soothes and makes wise in others. The night my poor *Red, White and Blue* went down, I had on board Doctor Engel, a very eminent entomologist, a fellow-traveller of Emin Pasha, whom I was to put ashore at Port Mahon, whither he was going to study the flora. That man, an adventurer and buccaneer in science, who had met death a hundred times and in its most ghastly forms, went mad with fear as the water crept over the deck. He sobbed, he roared that he did not wish to die, and leaped at Papa Nuitt's throat, who finally ordered him made fast in the deck-house, so that the poor devil had to go to the bottom bound hand and foot, as if he were in the prisoner's dock. And while a man of Engel's intellectual powers exhibited that mental decomposition, my steward, crouching in a corner of the deck with his tea kettle and alcohol lamp, had but one thought when he heard the gurgle of the rising water, and the bulkheads bursting, — and that was to make me a cup of hot tea before the final plunge. By the way, he was the only one who was saved with

me; but I noticed that to the very end he remained perfectly calm and cool, and as naturally as possible, whereas I *had to give my mind to it.*

One of the few fellows of whom I see a little something here, is a lieutenant in the reserves, who has obtained the favor of remaining in the regiment after the manœuvres and going through a supplementary period of instruction. What strange tastes people have! He is passionately fond of the soldier's trade; he loves to serve and to obey, strict discipline and distinction of rank. By the way, he is the son of one of our gamekeepers whom the Sénart poachers have dubbed the "Indian." I commend to your philosophical mind this hereditary instinct for military servitude, which this tall strapping youth, at the head of the silk department in one of the caravanseries of Parisian trade, has been unable to escape. You have seen apprentices with hearty appetites who make you hungry by their way of cutting a slice of bread and placing on either side of it, with the point of the knife, a mouthful of meat or cheese cut in a square; Lieutenant Sautecœur has a similar effect on me. He would make me like military life by the taste he has for it, by the joy with which he performs the most unpleasant tasks. A typical officer's servant and banner-bearer. He weeps when he reads Déroulède's verses and goes into ecstasies over well-polished tunic buttons. Except for the old Indian, whose pride he is, except for his young wife, whom he adores, how quickly he would drop the silk business and sail for Tonquin

or Senegal, to get his hand in on yellow or black skins, pending the great day! But the father is drunk with joy when he walks on the arm of his son in the costume of an officer of dragoons; and when the little woman, a slender little Parisian, homely and tempting as sin, comes to breakfast at Melun with her husband, my lieutenant's eyes flash in a way that would make it dangerous for him to go near a powder magazine. I understand his hesitation to start for Dakar. For my own part, since a breakfast which I offered the young couple on the shore of the Marne, and the dialogue between my boot and a dainty, nervous, little buskin not in the least shy, I propose to go rather more frequently and prowl around the Hermitage, where my lieutenant's wife passes part of the year nursing her delicate bronchial tubes in the neighborhood of the groves of firs. Meanwhile I am coddling the husband, who always entertained for me an idolatrous respect that would make one die of laughter. If he ever finds me in his wife's bed, there will be a touch of pride in his grief.

Save this fellow, I have become intimate with no one in the regiment. I have noticed, O my philosopher, that an over-stout tailor makes your waistcoats so that you seem to have a tremendous paunch, that a portrait-painter who is favored with a long nose tries to pass it on to all his sitters. It is probably owing to an identical phenomenon of subjectivity that I find on all my comrades, conscripts or conditional recruits, the same sleepy, morose countenance, the verb, "I am bored to

death," conjugated in all moods and tenses, present and future, active and passive. Is it obligatory service which is responsible for that? Have the youth of France laid aside, with their assumption of the uniform military strait-jacket, what little push and individuality they still retained? At all events they do not seem to be enjoying themselves in the 50th Dragoons, nor to be thinking of anything under heaven. Sautecœur is an idiot; but he does at least believe in life, he bustles about and bestirs himself, especially in these days of great manœuvres.

Having some special service in hand, he cannot sleep nor eat, he sets men and teeth on edge. Indeed, I believe that, by dint of watching the enemy too closely to throw him off the scent, he has disarranged the plans of our generals, two placid old gentlemen who don't like to get up in the morning. An amusing little sketch is in circulation among the staff, showing them, both dressed as old *Invalides*, playing peacefully at skittles, and beating a big dog with the words "Special service" on his collar, whose mad pranks have upset the whole game. This caricature is attributed to a soldier of my troop, a Parisian of Polish origin named Borski, a tall, light-haired fellow with thin lips and a furtive glance. He is a twelve-months' volunteer, and had succeeded in getting excused from extra duty by making a crayon portrait of the colonel, which was a great success; he was just beginning mine, in an upper room of the mill, filled with bags of grain and lighted by very

small round windows, when a comrade interrupted us: "Come quick, Borski, you're wanted at the colonel's quarters; there are two gentlemen from Paris with him."

"I am done for," said the poor devil aloud, and I saw that he glanced up at the windows, which were too narrow for him to escape that way. We supposed that he was in trouble about his game of skittles, but that evening my cousin informed me that it was a more serious matter. Borski was a member of a gang of counterfeiters and had been long engaged in making spurious banknotes with unparalleled skill. There was between the Bank and him one of those desperate, mysterious duels, as to which care is taken not to inform the public; new plates were constantly used and new complications introduced in the engraving and printing; but they were at once detected and imitated. In this way Borski obtained a great deal of money with which to gratify the caprices of a very beautiful damsel. The regiment talks of nothing else.

For my part I still have in my mind the sudden relaxation of the nerves which brought that tall fellow to his feet, and his glance toward the windows! There was life in that movement, in those eyes; he burned up all that was combustible in a second. Ah! Vallongue, what must life be to such a reckless devil, what importance the most trivial things assume! A letter that he receives, a knock at his door, the touch of a passer-by in the street, the appearance of the street, the house where perhaps they are watching for him, the

stairway by which he must escape, everything is full of passionate interest to him. Not a moment of ennui. All the senses sharpened, all the faculties aroused. How good a glass of good wine must taste to him, and how sweet the night of love which may be his last night! To say nothing of the fact that these outlaws inspire in woman a frantic longing for self-sacrifice and devotion. Tell me honestly, my dear fellow, would n't a chance to pass a few years in Borski's skin tempt you? A criminal, I grant you. But an almost ideal crime, without weapons or violence, neither degrading nor cruel, a pretty sort of work with a dry point, in the evening, by lamplight, opposite a lovely, well-groomed girl, who lightens and gives a touch of poesy to the task. What a difference between that existence and the existence you and I lead! I await your reply on this subject, my philosopher.

It was Mme. de Longueville who, so you told me the other day, made that terrible confession concerning womankind, that in order to love absolutely, there must be a little contempt mingled with their love. That would explain the inclination of certain women for such men as Borski, one at the top, the other at the bottom of the social ladder. That reminds me of a story a very illustrious musician and member of the Institute told last summer on the terrace at Grosbourg: "I was twenty years old," he said. "A poor wild creature, whom I had brought home from a ball at Montmartre, asked me, on waking in the

morning: 'Who are you, anyway?' I made her believe that I was a barber's apprentice on Rue du Bac. She had only to look at me and my mane, in that little room in the Latin Quarter furnished with an iron bed and a piano, to see the improbability of the story; but I had to do with the most vicious and most credulous creature on earth, the most vulgar and debauched *ingénue* that ever came from a ball-room on the outer boulevards. The gift of a few bottles of perfumery, jars of pommade and green soaps, which I told her I had filched from my master, convinced her completely. Being put at her ease by the ignoble nature of my trade, she came often to see me, and I amused myself by embellishing my character with the most extraordinary, most horrible revelations. I lived by infamous trades: I was a thief, a pimp, and, worse than all, I was known in the Quarter by the name of 'the fair Césarine.' The game might end badly; but my reckless humor saw in it nothing but the horror of that pretty goose, the frantic greediness with which she threw herself at my lips after these horrible confessions, which seemed to be extorted by love, and which were rewarded by others, a little less abominable, but spiced with devilry all the same, and also some affectionate, motherly advice: 'Take care, my little cat; don't let 'em nab you.' Her love was founded upon patronizing, indulgent pity. She comforted me, and soothed my remorse — for I was remorseful sometimes; I was so young. Then the poor girl

would rock my head in her two hands, wipe my eyes with kisses, with the silky warmth of her disordered hair, or, tormented by sentiment and idealism, would try to raise me from the materialistic slime in which I wallowed frantically in those nocturnal effusions, — 'And yet, my little pet, there are times when you feel that you have a soul, aren't there?' And you can't imagine the moments, the posture which she selected to preach her idealistic doctrine to me."

Our academician's strange *liaison* lasted three or four months; and that man, who has inspired such frenzied passions as are never heard of except in music, declared that he had never felt that he was so ardently loved, that he had never penetrated so to the very lowest depths of the whole feminine being as during those few months. The unhappy creature laid bare her most secret thoughts to him, all the side-lights of her vile trade, her distress, her streaks of luck, and trafficking of a sort to turn one's stomach; above all else, her fear of the police and of getting the sack. He continued his rôle of infamous criminal, embarrassed at times when she tried to make him accept money to prevent his risking a "too dirty trick." Then she suddenly disappeared, gave up her furnished room at Montmartre, and answered no letters. Had she discovered that he was laughing at her, or was she afraid that he would compromise her and cause her arrest with him? However, that matters little. Borski interests me more than anything else now; and his

existence, compared with my dull and lifeless one, makes me envy him. To live, oh! to live!

In a railway carriage the other day, the windows being closed, I watched an insect — a fly — which was trying to escape, and, feeling the invisible obstacle, kept beating wildly against the glass, without stopping for an instant. He rushed against it with all the force of his tense, obstinate, quivering little being, with his feelers out, and kept it up for two hours, all the way to Melun. And I admired that frantic ephemeral, who, having so few moments to live, passed them in revolt against his imprisonment, against being vulgarly suffocated in a first-class carriage. How are we to better ourselves, Vallongue? how are we to escape from our bourgeois mode of life? By a crime, like Borski, or by a mad freak, like Mme. F——, at Quiberon? By hook or by crook I will escape from it; but when, in what way? Ah! if dreams were true! Listen to this one, which bothered me last night. As some men of the engineer corps were digging a trench of circumvallation in a field of beets opposite the mill, they unearthed an enormous book, with red edges eaten by mould, swarming with white worms and ants, and two men brought it to the table where the staff were finishing breakfast. It was called the *Bottin of the World,* and contained, in small elzevir type, printed very close, the biographies of all the present dwellers upon the globe, with their surnames, baptismal names, and the principal incidents in their lives from the first day to the last.

"I beg pardon, messieurs, — my turn first," said the colonel, waving us back with his lighted cigar. And while a score or more stood around him, quaking with fear, he turned over the leaves of the great book, very calmly winking his one little eye; but instead of turning to his own letter, his own name, he was looking for ours, as if he were afraid to read his own destiny. All who came after him showed the same weakness, dared not risk a glance at their own biographical page. As I, being a simple dragoon, came last, I finally said to them, "Come, come, messieurs, look at d'Olmütz. At what age and in what way shall I die?" How my heart beat as the leaves were turned! At last the colonel began to read, in his official voice, "Charles Alexis Dauvergne, Prince d'Olmütz — " Then he stopped short, while all the rest turned pale as death and left the room, one by one, without looking at me, leaving me alone with the great book closed on the table. Wild with curiosity, I opened it at my name, and tried to read. But the words ran together, and became entangled and indecipherable; it was a ghastly thing, that blurring of the lines and letters of my destiny, where everything was written, nothing readable.

The bugles are ringing to horse, Vallongue; the enemy is approaching, although he was not expected till day after to-morrow. This must be a trick of Lieutenant Sautecœur's. Adieu for a short time, philosopher.

CHARLEXIS.

XI.

FIVE weeks after Mme. Fénigan's departure with Cousin Élise, a small railway omnibus, which had come from Soisy by the road along the cliff, shrouded in the white mist of a November morning, halted at the estate of Uzelles. The bell at the gate rang twice, as if muffled by the mist. Not until the second stroke did Rosine Chuchin, her old father and the coachman, who were regaling themselves in the gardener's lodge upon rich café au lait, made with real cream, and butter of that day's churning, all run to the main gateway, just in time to see Mme. Fénigan alight alone, muffled up and half asleep, as if after a long night journey.

"My bed, Rosine; I am nearly dead," said the mistress, as she crossed the courtyard, heedless of the alarm of all three, and of the line of steaming bowls on the table in the lodge, the door of which was left open. She must have been weary indeed. Gradually, however, the warmth of her room and the comfort of old habits restored to the good woman sufficient strength and life to enable her to put several questions to Rosine, who was assisting her regular maid.

"How is Monsieur Richard?"

"Monsieur Richard is still in bed. Does Madame wish me to call him?"

"No! I simply wanted to know if he has made any change in his mode of life."

"None at all, Madame. He does n't go out, and has his meals served in the study, where he passes his days writing letters and practising with the pistol, humming all the time, as his way is. Sometimes a walk with Monsieur Mérivet along the hedgerow, and that 's all."

"You must have seen Abbé Cérès here, have n't you?"

"Oh, no! It was a very short time after you went away that he had his dispute with Monsieur le Curé on the subject of the Lucriots, and he was summoned before the bishop at Versailles. He has n't come back since."

"Poor Monsieur Cérès!" sighed Mme. Fénigan, in a soft, sorrowful tone, in which there was a reflection of the delicious sensation of stretching out her limbs between warmed and perfumed sheets, in a bed to which she was accustomed. Rosine was surprised beyond measure to find her mistress so indulgent to the vicar of beggars and tramps.

"So Richard does n't even go out on Sundays, not even as far as the Little Parish Church, to please his old friend?"

"Why, Madame, the Little Parish Church is closed. Monsieur Mérivet would n't allow any other priest to say mass there after Abbé Cérès went away."

"That 's a very extraordinary thing," murmured the old lady, whose happy face contrasted strangely with her pretended stupefaction at all this news. The fact was that, as she had been kept informed of everything by little Napoléon's letters, she was at that moment simply refreshing her memory and verifying what he had told her.

"And tell me, Rosine, has my son never asked where I was?"

"Never. Monsieur Richard knew what Madame told us all, that she was going for a little rest at the seashore, to stay with Madame Élise."

Rosine was lying shamelessly, strong in her twofold cunning as peasant girl and servant. She had learned from M. Alexandre of her former mistress's abortive attempt at suicide, and the presence at Quiberon of the mother-in-law, whose return, alone, surprised her, indicating, as it did, that Lydie was cured. She also knew the state of apprehension in which the family at Grosbourg were living, the efforts to intercept Richard's constant challenges; she could even have informed Mme. Fénigan concerning the minute espionage which M. Alexandre, in obedience to orders, kept upon her son's correspondence. But, for a moment or two, the good woman had shown signs of weariness, of absent-mindedness, and listened with only one ear to stories which would ordinarily have aroused her deepest interest, like the peccadilloes of the dormice and of Clément her gardener. After ordering a bowl of hot milk, which bore little

resemblance to what they were drinking below a moment earlier, she dismissed Rosine Chuchin, preferring to her chatter and her restless fluttering about the bed the delight of feeling that she was alone in that room overflowing with memories, of listening drowsily to the melancholy autumn cries that passed along the mist-laden road, — "Rabbit skins — rags and old iron to sell!" — For more than thirty years she had heard that same woman's voice, husky and soft, sending up that morning refrain, in the cold months only, for the country rag-picker is employed in the fields during the spring and summer. And in her half-sleep, that voice, dying away in the distance, connected with various, long-past periods of her life, seemed to her to be carrying bundles of memories and of dead hours: "Rags — old iron to sell!"

Two quick, well-known raps at her door made her heart leap and her drooping eyelids reopen.

"Is it you, Richard? Come in."

They had parted coldly, barely touching each other's cheeks, without a word. In the five weeks she had been absent, not a letter had passed between them. And now, when she saw that cold, stern face, those angry eyes, which looked away from her, the mother knew that their alienation still endured; but instead of moping, she smiled, and holding him by the hand in spite of his reluctance, made him sit on the edge of the bed, having a long, a very long story to tell him.

"Later, mother, later. You are too tired now."

"No. As I have you here, I prefer to tell you all now. Sit there and listen."

Softly, in simple words, she began the story of her journey to Quiberon; how that idea had occurred to her after their horrible scene in the conservatory, with the profound conviction that her son's reproaches were founded on truth, that for Lydie, as for others, she had been lacking in indulgence and affection, and that it was her duty to try and repair a part of the evil she had caused. Then her arrival at the little village not far from Lorient, where the young woman was hiding, the few days of waiting and watching, and when at last, touched to the heart by that solitary, dignified existence, by the noble pride with which she bore her desertion, she went one morning to call at the yellow house, her stupefaction on finding Lydie dying there, in the bungling hands of a country doctor, whose little knives trembled as he cut into that red and white breast, trying to extract a pistol ball.

Richard listened without moving, his head on his breast, and eyes averted, as if to conceal his sensations, which the mother could divine only by the hand she held, — that hand, sullen at first, but gradually becoming docile and kindly, and finally abandoning itself to her, becoming once more — as when he was a little boy — the trustful, loving hand of the child who clings to its mother: "Guide me; do not let me go."

At the mercy of that obscure veterinary, Lydie

would not have survived; but luckily the fleet was in the harbor, and, with the fleet, surgeons, ice, absorbent cotton, and all the latest antiseptics, which were generously placed at the invalid's disposal, thanks to Élise, the officers of the medical department being all friends of hers. Yes, Élise, dear Little Red-Riding-Hood, whom one would never have supposed to be capable of long-continued charity, self-sacrifice and discretion — Élise, passing days and nights at the bedside of her rival, her enemy, and vanishing as soon as Lydie began to come to life again and to recognize faces. When she was free, at last, from the phantasmal apparitions of the fever, the first real, living face that appeared beside her bed was the face she detested most bitterly, the face upon which she visited all her antipathy, to which she attributed her errors, — the face of her mother-in-law. She had had to coax back from a long distance that ulcerated heart, still tortured by its last cruel disappointment, and struggling fiercely against the affection and care that were offered her. — "No, leave me; I am unworthy — neither you nor your son will ever be able to forget. Indeed, if you should forgive me, I should not forgive myself. I prefer to die. What right have you to keep me from dying, wicked woman?" — She purposely sought the most insulting words, raked burning memories, red-hot ashes over her own wounds. Luckily, she was not talking to a mother-in-law, but to a real mother, a patient heart, without pride, with no vestige of pride

" She was free, at last, from the phantasmal apparitions of the fever."

remaining, who said to herself all the time: "It is fitting that I should repair the evil I have done."

Ah! how Richard's hand was trembling now, and how lovingly it pressed the hand that held it!

From day to day, by dint of gentleness and patience, Lydie recovered her taste for life, allowing herself to be nursed, although a sombre expression lingered in the depths of her lovely eyes, and she persisted in saying "Madame" to her who never addressed her in any other way than as "my child." She rebelled especially against the humiliating idea of pardon; and nothing less would avail to put an end to her resistance than the return of M. Alexandre, sent by the people at Grosbourg to adjust the "finances of the rupture." From her chamber the invalid heard the haughty and indignant words with which Mme. Fénigan dismissed the rascally emissary and bade him hasten back with his money to the duchess. "For however rich and avaricious she may be, she will never have enough of that vile dross to redeem her son's follies and crimes."— Deeply touched to find that she had such a protector and avenger, Lydie, when her mother-in-law returned to her room, held out her arms, weeping. "Thanks, mother." That word "mother," which she persuaded herself to pronounce, cemented the reconciliation. It was no longer a question of anything but time and care, and Mme. Fénigan became more affectionate every day, being convinced that Lydie's sin was

due entirely to a spirit of revolt and independence, — the mad outbreak of a nature made for free air and space, and which feels as if it were in prison. A heart so loyal and affectionate as hers could retain only a hateful memory of a cruel, cold-blooded boy like Charley. There was no fear of a relapse in that direction, no possibility of regret or recapture; but the idea of returning to a normal mode of life, of taking her place once more at the fireside, alarmed the young woman. To find herself face to face with Richard, to whom she had been so cruel, so wicked! — Could he ever forget? Mme. Fénigan tried to reassure her: "Why, remember that he loves you and pities you; that he has never ceased to love you for a single day." Lydie shook her head: "If you were so sure of it, why conceal from him that you were coming to me?" — Nothing is so contagious as fear. Seeing her daughter-in-law so fearful, Mme. Fénigan also began to doubt, and, finding that she was sufficiently recovered to do without her, determined to return home alone, to say to Richard, "This is what I have done: I have allowed your wife to hope that you can still live together and be happy. What do you think about it?"

There was a deathly silence in the room. Richard's face was still invisible, and his hand still clung, burning and trembling, to his mother's. Again Mme. Fénigan asked, in a whisper:

"What do you think about it? Have I done well?"

Richard made no reply, but knelt beside the bed, sobbing.

Although she expected that explosion of gratitude, the mother's face beamed; she was repaid for all her trouble. But there was something that surprised her; and as she ran her hands through her son's short, stiff hair, she said to herself, "Why does n't he ask me where his wife is, at once?" She felt disturbed, embarrassed; but everything was explained by two words which Richard whispered, timidly raising his eyes:—

"The child?"

"There is none."

"Did it die?"

"It never lived."

With one bound he was on his feet, and straining his mother to his heart, —

"Oh! how happy you make me! If you knew! — that child — I had longed so for one! — A reconciliation would never have been possible with that between us. I felt it so strongly, that, notwithstanding my frantic desire to see her again, I have never once tried to find out where she was. Oh! I thought of that child even more than of her."

And he told her, under his breath, that at daybreak, one morning, during her absence, he had been awakened by horrible shrieks, as if an animal were being killed, and had rushed from his bed to the window. They came from the neighboring farm, where everything was perfectly peaceful, however, just waking to new life amid the

crowing of the cocks, the trumpeting of the peacocks on their perches, the dull lowing of the cattle in the warm barn. Soon, in that slow, painful outcry, which it hurt him so to hear — at one moment a loud shriek that filled the air, and again a gentle, soothing moan — he recognized a human cry — the cry of a woman — and realized that the farmer's wife, their neighbor, was in labor. It was a grand thing, the arrival of that little creature in the pink mist of the dawning day, that moaning of a woman in travail, mingled with the waking noises of the barn-yard and the morning sounds of nature; and, anon, changing to the cry of an animal, the straining of a wheel in the vast and mysterious machine that is always at work.

Suddenly he thought of his poor Lydie, who, perhaps, at that very moment, was going through that same agony, and he was seized with frantic despair. "Ah! if you had seen me weeping at my window! I must have been a very comical sight. But now the tears are done. And, thanks to you, dearest mother, my wife is coming back to me; I shall see her again. Indeed, I am surprised that you did n't bring her. Why did n't you?"

"She was still very weak."

Mme. Fénigan turned her eyes away in some embarrassment; she was not very expert in lying. Her son continued: "It must be so dismal at Port-Haliguen when winter is coming on. You see, her black thoughts will seize her again."

"But, at all events, bad boy, I was obliged to come home. They wrote me that you were determined on this duel; that they passed their lives watching for your letters and keeping track of them."

And, pressing him to her heart with all the affection of her arms, the mother, feeling that she was strong, hastily poured forth her words of entreaty:

"Dear Richard, you are so noble-hearted, so kind; how can you fail to have pity on that father, that soldier struck down in a glorious career, who sits in his paralytic's chair, receiving all the insults, all the abuse that you intend for his son? Can you imagine a more utterly distressing plight? Forced to abandon his *rôle* as the head of the family and its defender, reduced to the petty tricks, the cunning wiles of a woman who looks over the mails and bribes postmen! The wretched man! why, it is killing him to be unable to fight and die for his son. And you have refused to be touched!"

Richard had torn himself from his mother's embrace, and was walking up and down the room. "Yes, I know, our old friend came and gave me my fill of all those things, and I will answer you as I answered him, that those people have injured me so deeply that it is impossible for me to have any pity for them. All alike — son, father — Ah! how I have suffered!"

"You have suffered principally in your pride. But a mother who fears that somebody will kill her child —"

"These are old Mérivet's ideas that you are repeating to me," said Richard, gently. "From whom do you think I inherit this pride for which you reproach me?"

"From your mother, don't you? Very well! do as I did; I got rid of mine."

"How?"

"Oh! it was a very simple matter. I went into the Little Parish Church. Don't laugh; the effect was miraculous. I was a different woman when I came out, with an entirely different, entirely new way of looking at things. Why? I have no idea."

More moved than he chose to appear, Richard rejoined, in a light tone: "Unfortunately the Little Parish Church has lain idle for a month."

"Ah! yes," said she, without taking her eyes from his face. "I heard of that distressing incident. How unjust they were to that excellent priest! You interested yourself in him, and went to see Monseigneur, didn't you? I was so happy to hear it!"

"Really? — were you really?"

His honest face beamed with delighted amazement. Knowing that his mother was a friend of the curé of Draveil, he feared that he might have displeased her by his appeal to the bishop. But the calumny was too infamous altogether. To think that they accused Abbé Cérès of having had the smallest Lucriot girl for his mistress, while he gave Lucriot's old mother and his three daughters shelter during the father's imprisonment for poaching! "Does n't that make your blood boil

with indignation? Yes, that deformed, scrofulous, epileptic child, of no age, almost of no sex — that is the temptation which that venerable man, that saint, is supposed to have been unable to resist! Naturally there was no evidence except that they lived several weeks under the same roof. And when I think that the whole hideous campaign was waged by that worldly puppy of a curé, that parasite of the tables of the rich, to which he used to beg invitations for his housekeeper — "

Mme. Fénigan — perhaps she had some invitations of that sort with which to reproach herself — hastily interrupted her son:

"What reply did Monseigneur make?"

"A decree of several pages with citations from Tertullian. Monsieur le Curé is a venerable pastor, Monsieur le Vicaire a great, kind-hearted child. Meanwhile, our old friend is in retirement for three months at the Trappist establishment at Aiguebelle, while Monsieur le Curé circulates among the châteaux a petition to rid the province of this priest who loves and associates with none but beggars and vagabonds. Only your signature is lacking, and the curé is awaiting your return to procure that."

"Let him come! he will receive a warm welcome."

"You will refuse to sign?" said Richard, overjoyed. "Well, for my part, I promise that if these curs over opposite leave me in peace I will think no more about them."

"They will leave you in peace; I am willing

to take my oath. Now, let me have your big face to pat a moment, and then off with you. I must go to sleep."

"But I would like — Lydie can't stay down there all alone, you understand."

"Yes, yes, I understand," said his mother, with a smile. "We will talk about that at dinner. I need a day's rest. Go, my darling."

To remain shut up in his study until evening seemed insupportable to Richard, and, for the first time in many weeks, he passed through the gate leading into the forest — the gate that had witnessed Lydie's flight — with the firm intention of not returning until night. At that season, however, the forest was no longer beautiful; the high equinoctial winds and heavy rains had stripped it of its last leaves, covering the ground with a yellowish, muddy slime. The underbrush, the windings of the paths were divested of all mystery, the distant prospects seemed nearer, and the endless fence of the Grosbourg preserves, visible from everywhere, gave to little Sénart the appearance of a forest of iron wire. The disappearance of the scenery had caused the disbanding of the orchestra. Here and there, in the midst of a copse, a blackbird, apparently of enormous size, sang and hopped about as if he were in a cage; flocks of crows whirled about among the tree-tops, and over the abandoned quarries, filled with rain-water, two or three wild ducks were diverting themselves, their nasal trumpet-calls echoing through the silent paths. But Richard

had in his head that day a deafening blare of trumpets, which, as he walked, he accompanied with his usual: "Poum-poum;" but the "poum-poum" was joyful and excited, as light and airy as the refrain consisting of trills and roulades alone, the ballad of love and of regeneration which echoed all about him while he walked through an imaginary forest, full of perfumes and lights and the songs of birds. So they could love each other, embrace each other once more; nothing seemed beyond repair to his amorous heart, and he had already ceased to feel that horrible burning sensation, that red-hot coal in the pit of his stomach, which caused a contraction of all his limbs. His jealousy was cured, his wound washed in Lydie's tears and blood.

Dear girl! How she must have suffered, to have reached the point of suicide, — she who loved life so well! There was no further question of pardon for one who had expiated her sin so cruelly. She came to him with a new flesh, purified by suffering; and it would be sweet to rest his head upon it, to breathe that sweet fragrance of ripening youth, that aroma of violets and lilies of the valley which the underbrush exhales toward the close of spring.

"*Sapristi!* Monsieur Richard; you're a-foot bright and early. Are you in a hurry for your breakfast? If not, come into the Hermitage a moment, and break a crust with us."

"But perhaps your daughter-in-law won't like it, my good Eugène."

"Oh! yes, indeed! It will be a change for her, for once, not to have to eat alone with my old skin."

The Indian, who was returning from his first round, his rifle slung over his shoulder and a rabbit in his game-bag, admitted Richard by the Pacôme gate, — formerly the gate by which heavy vehicles entered the convent, — with its massive arch and worm-eaten, disjointed planks, opening into the grass-grown courtyard where the younger Sautecœur's wedding guests danced and made merry a few months before. Two wine-shops, deserted during the week, and the keeper's house, flanked by its odoriferous and noisy kennel, occupied the site of the former Hermitage around that rustic yard. While they were drinking a glass of old Hollands as an appetizer, in the neat, well-lighted living-room, on the walls of which simple hunting scenes were painted in water-color, the daughter-in-law joined them, in fashionable attire, and with her hair carefully dressed, notwithstanding the early hour, but red-eyed, and with an air of drowsiness and ennui. When she spied Richard Fénigan, instead of the gendarme or woodcutter whom she expected to find at table with her father-in-law, her eyes shot fire, her sickly, malapert little face became pretty in the frenzied desire to be so.

"What did I tell you?" whispered the Indian, confidentially, behind his enormous hand, while the coquettish daughter-in-law made haste to lay the table, brushing against them with her skirts

or her sleeves. "A bourgeois, a gentleman — I was sure of stirring her up with that. And just fancy that she passed the night in tears, on account of certain earrings which some one gave her, and which I gave back, because, in my boy's absence — "

"Why, where is your boy, Eugène?"

"With the regiment, Monsieur Richard, on supplementary service. He 's crazy over the trade of soldier, to the point of injuring himself at his shop, and, what 's worse, with his wife. Yesterday, look you, when she returned from Grosbourg, where I sent her to get some ants' eggs for the pheasant-house, the little one brings with her a pair of gold earrings in place of the little iron things I bought for her the other day at the Yères fête. 'Who gave you those?' I asked her. — 'The duchess, father.' — As I know that her ladyship is not of the giving kind — one may say that of one's masters, eh, Monsieur Richard? there 's nothing dishonorable in it — I saw at once where the present came from; and in the afternoon, without the little one's suspecting it, I went up to the Château, and I said to the duchess, who was on the stoop talking with M. Alexandre: 'Madame was kind enough to give my daughter some beautiful jewels.' — She looks at me with a way she has: 'I — give your daughter jewels?' — That old thief of an Alexandre made up a face to warn her. At last she understood. — 'Oh! yes, of course, I remember. Well, what is it; does n't your daughter think

they 're fine enough?' — 'A hundred times too fine for the likes of us,' I replied, in all honesty; 'and she asked me to return them to you, because an honest woman who is n't rich has no right to wear trinkets of such value.' — 'Thanks, Eugène; you can go,' the duchess replied. But I waited for M. Alexandre at the end of the bridge, all the same, to warn him that the first time he undertook such a commission, on the honor of Sautecœur! I 'd send him to take a header in the Seine, with a bullet in the middle of his forehead."

The keeper's little round eyes had assumed a savage expression.

"But whom did the earrings come from?" asked Richard, who felt that he was turning pale.

"From some one whom it is better for us not to mention," said the keeper, suddenly realizing his awkwardness. "*Dame!* the little one did n't like it. I heard her muttering all night long. Then this morning we had a thorough explanation. I warned her: 'You have two husbands, so to speak, my child. If one of them is blind and too good-natured, the other is suspicious, and has a rough grip. You must walk straight, or look out!' "

La Sautecœur, in a great white apron, with her sleeves rolled up, brought to the table an omelet with mushrooms, whose savory odor filled the whole room, and reached as far as the kennel, where the hungry beasts sniffed under the low door. But neither the savor of the rustic dish, nor

his hostess's alluring eyes could rouse Richard Fénigan from the gloomy reflections suddenly evoked by the young prince's shadow; and more than once during the repast, Eugène, who talked as slowly as he ate, with the typical sluggishness of the peasant, born of long days and vast spaces, was astonished to hear M. Richard, at the most interesting point of his stories of lying in wait at night for man or beast, humming away like an unmannerly boor.

While her son tarried at the Hermitage, believing her to be sound asleep, Mme. Fénigan — one of those active creatures who cannot sleep in the daytime — ordered the carriage, and was driven to the orphanage at Soisy. The tall trees at the entrance to the convent and the fretted steeple of its chapel were visible at a long distance; the front was being whitewashed, and the courtyard was crowded with ladders, tubs of plaster, masons and hodmen going to and fro, under the surveillance of the white cap with widespread wings of Sister Martha, the Irishwoman, acting as substitute for Mademoiselle de Bourron, the superior, who had been confined to her bed for a long while.

"We have workmen here, you see," she said to Mme. Fénigan, walking forward to meet her; and she added, in a lower tone, as she guided her through the labyrinth of apparatus:

"It happens very conveniently; the children and our sisters are forbidden to come this way.

Thus Lydie's room, in this wing, is protected from curiosity and indiscretion. When your daughter arrived this morning, there were only a few masons here, and the sister who acts as door-keeper, an old acquaintance of hers, to whom I have intrusted the duty of carrying up her meals and keeping her room in order. I have also told the doctor, the most judicious and reserved of men, who, as he comes to see the superior every day, will make a call on Lydie at the same time, her room being very near; and I do not think that our dear girl would have been better sheltered and nursed anywhere, either at the pheasant house or the Hermitage."

"I think so, too, Sister Martha; and it was really an inspiration from on high that turned my thoughts toward you, as I dared not take my poor Lydie directly to Uzelles. But I trust that we shall not abuse your hospitality."

At that Sister Martha waved her long thin arms with a touch of Irish petulance:

"You trust—you trust. Ah! you 're not going to take her away from me at once! She is so weak still, so pale. Think of that long journey for the first time she went out! The doctor has told her she must not leave her bed for two or three days. Shall we go up and see her?"

She added, in a loud tone, so as to be heard by every one: "Let us go and pay our respects to our dear mother superior; you will find her much changed;" then led the way to the broad staircase, with white walls like those of a Moorish

house, and a freshly painted stair-rail. The large beads of her rosary, and the bunch of keys which never left Mme. Fénigan, rattled in the long corridor, at the end of which was Lydie's room.

She lay in bed, white as a sheet but with her eyes open, and restrained a cry of joy when she saw Mme. Fénigan.

"Why, mother, you here already?"

"What would you have, my child; I could not sleep."

"Nor could I," replied Lydie, calling her attention to the fact that her room, which was very spacious and bright, was at the corner of the building, with one window looking on the open country, the other on the little garden into which the class-rooms opened, and where the children played all the time that the courtyard was so littered. "Ever since morning I have heard the children dancing and singing and reciting lessons, and the voices of the good sisters. It seems to me that I am still a pupil and that my turn is coming to recite. And the road, — our dear road. When you came in I was listening to all its noises, all its active movement."

Mme. Fénigan smiled, and leaned over her.

"You don't mention Richard?"

"I did not dare," murmured the convalescent, her long thin face clouding sorrowfully. But as the mother told her of the way in which the story of her journey and their reconciliation was received, the explosion of tears at the end, the feverish longing, the trembling hands of the man

who had never ceased to love her, life returned to that pretty face as the color returns to a piece of cloth that has been washed.

"Now I am sure that our fears were groundless, and that I ought to have taken you straight to his arms. I will tell him as soon as I go home that you are here, and we will come and fetch you to-morrow morning."

"Oh! not to-morrow; not yet, I beg you," said the young woman, in dismay, pulling up the bedclothes with a childish gesture; "I should be too frightened. I am so thin, so ugly — and then that" — she pointed to the star-shaped wound under her left breast. — "The doctor said he should have to dress it several times. And if Richard, when he sees me, should not love me any more, should not want me — "

"But, my child, if he is to know that you are here, nothing can keep him away from you."

"Let him believe that I am still a long way off; that my health demands it. That is not far from the truth after all."

"And suppose he insists on going to join you?"

"You will invent some little falsehood to keep him from it — and you will let me stay a few days in this home of my youth, where he knew me and loved me, where I will recover my strength and try to become beautiful and worthy of his love once more."

In that which her words and gestures left unexpressed could be divined a feeling that she must purify herself by solitude and meditation. It

seemed to her that within the white walls of the orphanage she would become a little girl again. And Mme. Fénigan understood her so well that she replied, without further urging:

"It shall be when you wish and as you wish, my darling child; don't be unhappy about it."

As she went out she passed a few moments with the superior, so that she could tell Richard that she had seen her, and thus account for her visit to the orphanage. To Sister Martha, who was looking over a contractor's account by the bedside of the drowsy old nun, she whispered: "I have decided to leave our little Lydie with you a few days longer; I shall come often to see her. As she entered the carriage, she said, "Drive home. Poor Mother de Bourron is very weak, very weak."

These words, spoken aloud for the coachman's benefit, made him smile contemptuously on his box. He knew what to think; for the cabman from the station had told that morning at the gardener's lodge, that Mme. Fénigan had left the train with a young woman who seemed very ill, and whom they had left at the convent of Soisy as they passed; and Richard was still in ignorance of his wife's presence in the province, when all the servants knew it! There is no large household where such things do not happen.

XII.

To her great surprise, Mme. Fénigan, on returning to Uzelles, had not to contend with her son's amorous haste. He was silent and gloomy; but he was affectionate to his mother, once more her Richard of the evenings passed together over the chess-board. As they played, their foreheads, bending over the board, almost touched; but what a gulf between their minds!

"What has happened to him?" the mother thought. "That furrow between his eyes, that contraction of the nostrils, and his everlasting humming. It 's a new attack, — I am sure that it 's a new attack. Shall we continue to have them long?" — Richard, meanwhile, was saying to himself, "She did well not to bring her here; my wound is too raw still; it is better to wait a few days. Here I am, wild, frantic again, simply because that Charley's name was mentioned in my presence. If my poor love had been here I should have tormented her, with no pity for her weakness."

However, after a week of secret tempests, followed by calms, he said to his mother, who had kept him constantly informed of Lydie's condition, as if she were still at Quiberon:

"Now I am sure of myself. Let us go and fetch her, — shall we?"

Mme. Fénigan smiled.

"We have n't far to go."

"How so?"

"Barely half-an-hour, with the landau."

"Half-an-hour from here to Quiberon? I don't understand."

"Why, Lydie has been at the orphanage ever since I came home. — Now don't get excited, you great child. We will have the horses put in after breakfast, and this evening you shall bring your wife back to the Pavilion at last. How is that? Are you satisfied?"

What words, what exclamations could have expressed Richard Fénigan's anxious joy as he sat beside his mother in the landau, driving toward Soisy, between the forest and the Seine? A lovely, cold, clear day, with wind, and sun, and snow; and his bosom swelled with the memory of similar afternoons passed in the parlor with the light wainscoting, — the winter that he was paying court to Lydie. Then, as to-day, the sun flashed on the snow, which the north wind swept up like fine dust; then, as to-day, he lacked words to express his ecstasy; and of the chant intoned by all the fibres of his being, not a sound came forth, nothing could be heard save his heart-beats, marking time for his speechless emotion. Ten years had passed since, on that same road, in that same countryside, all swathed in white, his mother tried, as she tried now, to divert his

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thoughts, talking without interruption, on the back seat of the carriage: "I have had the Pavilion prepared. You are to dine together in the study; I thought that would be better the first night. Then to-morrow we will begin once more our life together; Lydie herself asked that it might be so. There is so much delicacy of feeling in that child! and so refined, too, so distinguished! I begin to believe, with Sister Martha, that she is really of noble birth; she is a born great lady. Ah! here we are."

The landau had drawn up noiselessly on the snow, at the foot of the main stairway, where Sister Martha awaited them.

"This makes us ten years younger, Monsieur Richard," said the Irishwoman, in her earnest tone and manner. "It was I, do you remember, who took you into the parlor? This time you will find our dear daughter in her bedroom. Your mother and I will join you in a little while, when we leave Mademoiselle de Bourron."

Richard, left alone in the corridor, hesitated a moment. Emotion hampered his slightest movements. From the room where he was expected, doubtless, a voice said before he knocked: "Come in," — a sweet, dear voice, which he had not heard for a long while. "I will run to her with open arms; I will have her against my breast before I speak a word." — That was the promise he had made to himself. She, likewise, intended to throw herself on his neck, to close his mouth with a long kiss. Nothing of what they had

planned took place, because they had, as the saying is, reckoned without their host, and the host here was the flesh, the beautiful, tempting and detestable flesh. Lydie, when he entered, was standing at the window on the further side of the room, in the dazzling reflection of the snow. Against the white glass her figure was sharply outlined, flowing and full, moulded into a dress of rose-colored woollen; her pretty face, in shadow, was surrounded by a nimbus of fine curly hair, and her pearl-gray eyes looked darker than they were. He stopped, amazed to find her as youthful and lovely as in his most passionate dreams, but with an envelopment of voluptuous grace which was unfamiliar to him, newly acquired, perhaps, in the other's arms; an unhealthy charm which attracted and repelled him at once, intoxicated him with love and with frantic rage.

He stood like a statue, two steps away; it seemed to him that if he approached her his fingers would irresistibly wind themselves around that turtle-dove's neck, to punish it for the other's caresses. At the same time, a horrible burning sensation about his heart warned him that the malady had laid hold of him anew, and he felt a profound despair in face of the impossibility of resuming life *à deux*, since that very beauty was the seat of the malady; and every time that he looked at her he went wild with jealousy. And as all these sensations, which assailed him swiftly and with great violence, were summed up in an intense longing to weep,

he hung his head, and said, in a hollow voice, with a trembling of the lower lip, "Good afternoon, Lydie."

That was all he could find to say at that moment, for which he had longed so eagerly.

"Good afternoon, Richard," she replied like an echo. Then there was a pause, during which they listened to the hissing of the coke on the hearth, and the humming of a dictation exercise which came up from the class-room of the larger girls. Suddenly, on the snow-covered, muffled road, a cornet and violin struck up the first lively measures of a quadrille, and purged the atmosphere of the embarrassment and distress that weighed them down.

"A wedding-party," murmured Lydie, instinctively; and Richard, walking to the window with her, added: "Is it Saturday, pray?" As in the old days during their betrothal, the road — the dear old road — came to their assistance.

"It was a Saturday that I arrived from Bretagne with mother." That word "mother," which she pronounced affectionately, was very sweet to Richard's ears. "I was awakened by notes of a wedding fiddle like this one. It gave me such pleasure!"

Richard, who was watching the procession, said to her, in an undertone, without turning his head, "So you haven't forgotten our Corbeil road?"

"Oh! no," she replied. She, too, looked out, and pointed to Père Sautecœur, who was return-

ing from the station with his son. Another of their familiar sights, the old keeper going to meet his son every Saturday, and returning with him through the forest, sometimes by Uzelles, sometimes by Soisy, according to the preserves he had to inspect. The boy passed Sunday at the Hermitage, and Monday morning his wife went to the station with him, the father going to make his weekly report. Those two giants, walking close together at the military step, shoulder to shoulder, without speaking, made the most touching sight imaginable.

"So Sautecœur's son has returned to the regiment."

Richard had no sooner made that remark than he cursed himself for doing it, for he had evoked in their anxious thoughts the image of the young prince, who served in the same troop with Eugène's boy. His elegant figure, his curly head, like a pretty wanton's, appeared before their mind's eye; and again an oppressive silence suffocated them. Luckily, another figure appeared, to distract their thoughts, — Père Georges with his wallet and his stick, sitting in the sun, opposite the orphanage, on a stone from which he had brushed the snow. Richard expressed his surprise that so old a man could have dragged himself so far in such weather.

"It seems as if he must have divined my presence in the house," said Lydie. "Whenever I draw my curtain aside in the afternoon I am certain to find him in the same spot."

"It is really a curious thing, the faithful, dog-like attachment that that beggar seems to have for you. After you went away, they used to pick him up every morning, dead drunk, in front of our gate. I fancied that grief was the cause of it; and that thought touched me so that I gave him shelter in my little cabin on the bank of the river."

"You did that, while you had so many reasons for detesting me! O, my Richard, how good you are!"

Deeply moved, she took his hand, and put it to her lips; but Richard snatched it away with a brutal gesture, of which he was instantly ashamed, and asked her forgiveness in a sob. "O, my wife! my wife!"

She uttered a heart-rending wail: "I knew that it was not possible."

"Yes, yes; it is. I promise you — but a little later."

Mme. Fénigan and Sister Martha entered the room. A single glance was enough for the mother to understand. But the Irishwoman, whose perception was less keen, exclaimed gayly, "Well, well, so this bad man has come to take my child from me for the second time!"

Lydie hastily interrupted her: "Why, no, my sister, I shall not go so soon. Richard requests you, and I myself entreat you to keep me a little longer."

"As long as you wish, dear child," replied Sister Martha, her great clear eyes enlarged with wonder. "But we shall have difficulty in con-

cealing you; our orphans go all over the house now. I have already been obliged to let several of our sisters into the secret."

"Do not be disturbed, Sister," said Richard, unable to conceal the painful effort that every word cost him. "We ask you for only a few days, — as few as possible, eh, Lydie?"

"Yes, dear," replied the young woman, with little assurance. Below, a bell rang for the recitations to end. Shrill cries and rippling laughter ascended from the little garden, and beat against the window with the branches of a larch-tree heavy with snow.

"Our little girls are going to prayers," said Sister Martha to Mme. Fénigan and her son; "if you wish to avoid inquisitive eyes, indiscreet remarks — "

"Let us go," said Richard, reluctantly. He felt an outburst of affection for his wife, a mad longing to take her little head in his hands, and she was putting forward her forehead, closing her quivering eyelids; but he simply held out his burning hands to her by way of adieu.

The windows of the Pavilion gleamed bright at the end of the dark hedgerow, with the pallid reflection of the snow on the ground and the trees, when the mother and son returned to Uzelles. It was the little festival prepared for the reconciliation of the husband and wife.

"Don't go there; it would make you too unhappy," said Mme. Fénigan, persuading Richard to go with her to the Château, where Napoléon

Mérivet, whom she had invited to dine with her that evening in order not to be left alone, was awaiting her return in the salon.

"Well, well! How's this? Where's your wife?" inquired the good man as he stood in front of the fire, his wet boots steaming.

"I could not; I could not," said the poor fellow, in a low voice, but with vehemence, while the mother motioned to their neighbor to be silent. He, himself had momentous matters in his head, of which he discoursed to his friends all through dinner. The curé of Draveil and the municipal council had actually undertaken to force him to open the Little Parish Church, which no longer belonged to him, as he had presented it to the Commune. To which old Napoléon replied that, as he paid the clergyman and the sacristan, the right to select them naturally belonged to him. So long as Abbé Cérès was vicar of Draveil no other priest than he should say mass in the roadside chapel; thereupon the curé had made divers hypocritical representations to the council.

"Is Uzelles to be left without God while my vicar's penance lasts?" And all the honest old fogies of the municipality fell into the trap, having no suspicion that it was a question of putting a few more extra sous into that evil-minded priest's already well-lined poor-box.

"But, by the glorious name I bear," said Napoléon Mérivet, brandishing his dessert-knife over his companions' heads, "I will rid the commune of him, — even if I have to apply to the Sover-

eign Pontiff, who was graciously pleased to decorate me with the order of Saint-Grégoire."

"But, meanwhile, you are forced to open your church," interposed Mme. Fénigan, amused by his wrath.

"That is where you are mistaken, madame. Moulin, the mason, will send his men to-morrow to sweep the snow off the steeple and do a little pointing up. It will be a long job, the weather is so bad and your country workman is so lazy. They will hardly finish before the day that my dear abbé leaves the Trappist convent of Aiguebelle." And the old man's indignation vanished in a frank and hearty laugh.

When the mother had retired, and the two men were left alone in the salon, they had one of those long, intimate conversations which had become habitual with them since their chat in the poppy field. The younger laid his heart bare, described his weaknesses, his agonizing torture, revived at the first meeting.

"I realized that if I should bring her home we should lead a horrible life — and yet, I have forgiven her, and with all my heart. What is there within me, then, that rebels, that will not consent? Ah! my friend, you did n't tell me it would be so hard!"

He paced the room as he spoke, discharged his words vehemently, with gestures like those of a sower of tares. The old man, nervous too, but controlling himself, poked the fire. — "I know all about it; I have been through it. When my

Irène returned, and I discovered, at night, on her sleeping face, right under the eyes and at the corners of her mouth, little wrinkles that had come while she was away from me, like the marks of kisses — do you suppose that all my flesh did n't rise in rebellion! But I had the kindly words, the support, the guidance which I have wished so earnestly that you might have in these cruel hours. Cérès talked to me in strong, stern language, as he would have talked to you: 'Yes, yes, she has belonged to another; she is no longer the wife of a single man. But whose is the fault? Are you, who complain of her, sure that you have always been faithful to her, — are you the husband of only one woman?'"

A burst of shrill music, followed by a confused tumult of voices, passed along the fleecy, muffled road in the darkness.

"The wedding-party going home to bed," said the old man, joyously. "When I think that at this moment, if you had chosen, you and your wife — Come, Richard, allow yourself to be happy; make your happiness complete at the price of a little pride. Try to calm yourself, to take back your wife, to make her your own again. It 's a matter of an embrace."

He did try, but in vain. In his former paroxysms, when the external, proximate cause disappeared, the malady disappeared with it. But now Lydie's beauty was like a reservoir, which steadily fed his jealous wrath, inflamed at every meeting by the constant temptation, and by the

thought that another than he, that other lips than his — "Ah! why did they prevent my killing him? So long as he lives, I shall feel that he is between us." — That was the end of all their conversations, in those exhausting hours which he passed at his wife's knees, torturing her with complaints, with reproaches, followed by long periods of silence, broken by the voices of the girls at their lessons, and the familiar noises of the road in winter, the itinerant distiller's bell, the hunchback with his cry: "Socks, socks, socks and shoes;" the slow creaking of the wheels of a caravan, with its little red curtains and the slender thread of smoke rising over the roof, glistening with rain.

But it was necessary to decide upon something. Lydie could not remain so long away from her home, and right at his door.

"This is what I advise," suggested old Mérivet. "I am obliged to go to Algeria for two or three months to adjust my alfa accounts. Let Lydie come and live here with Madame Fénigan, resume her place in the house, while Richard goes with me. The trip will be an excellent means of diverting his thoughts. That is what he has always lacked; he has lived too much within himself. I believe that when we return he will be cured; at all events, we shall find Abbé Cérès here, the Little Parish Church open; and if Richard will once go in there, the miracle I have witnessed so often will be performed once more."

"When do you go?"

"As soon as possible, my dear boy."

"Very well; I will bring my wife to the Pavilion to-morrow, we will pass a day together there, and that shall be the supreme effort. If I am not satisfied with myself, if I make her too miserable, you will see me at your house, ready to start, the next morning at dawn."

XIII.

THAT first evening in the large salon at Uzelles, with her husband and the woman whom she never called now by any other name than mother, was infinitely sweet to Lydie. When she opened the piano, and her long white hands, chasing each other over the key-board, wandered into the first measures of Pergolese's divine melody, of which Richard had so often sung the bass in his despair, the same emotion grasped them both by the throat; they felt that they were united and loving again forever, their hearts full of pity and of pardon. Outside the north wind groaned in the darkness, the sleet pelted against the windows. Never before, as on that evening, had Lydie's adventurous, gypsy-like little face realized the charm of the domestic hearth; it seemed to her that she had awakened from a nightmare, and was beginning life anew, — a happy, simple life, enveloped in the arms of her worthy, loyal, kindly spouse. Suddenly they heard songs and laughter on the road below. "What is going on this evening?" Richard asked.

"Why, those are the masks — Mardi Gras," said the mother; and as the same thought passed through the minds of all three, for a moment they

avoided looking at one another. Last year, on the same day, at the same hour, the bell at the outer gate was rung violently, and several carriages stopped at the main entrance and disgorged into the abruptly awakened salon a gay multitude of young men and women in masks and burlesque attire, who danced and capered about a long while before Charlexis made his appearance, — he and the lovely Jewesses who had assembled that evening at the Château of Mérogis. — Ah! that inopportune echo of the carnival! With it the cold and darkness from without entered the salon, and banished its genial, affectionate warmth. Richard rose. "Come, Lydie, we must let mamma go to bed."

Mme. Fénigan wished to ring for some one to go with them.

"Useless, mamma; Lydie knows the hedgerow well."

Yes, she knew it. But what meaning did he give to those words? Was it cruel irony, a purpose to insult her by recalling hours of shame and folly? In that case her martyrdom was only beginning. Lydie's hands and cheeks were as cold as ice when she went to Mme. Fénigan to bid her good-night.

He had said to her, "Let us try again. If it is of no use I will go away." And since she had been at the house, during their long afternoon walk in the park and kitchen-garden, during dinner, during the evening, there had been nothing, — not a word, not a glance, not a pressure of the

hand, which constituted an allusion to the past. And yet, opportunities had not been lacking; but he seemed to exert the greatest tact and delicacy in avoiding them, so that, although she had come rather hopelessly, she was beginning to believe in the possibility of a renewal of their joint life and happiness. She believed in it more strongly as the hour for retiring, for the intimate converse of the bedroom drew near. Strong in her beauty and in the sincerity of her resolutions, she thought: "Let me once have him in my arms, I am sure he will remain mine." But after that accursed reminder of the carnival she had a presentiment that her happiness, near at hand as it was, would, none the less, elude her. So how closely she pressed against Richard in the dark avenue! Every moment her foot slipped on the ice, and gave her an excuse for leaning upon him; and the loud breathing of the great hounds, released for the night, and prowling through the park and around them, the cracking of the sleet-laden branches, the slamming of the door of the isba in the distance, startled her again and again, and caused her to throw herself, shuddering, against her husband's heart.

"I have known you to be braver," he said, gently, but without responding to her pressure of his arm.

"Less nervous, perhaps, my dear. —" And in a lower tone: "I have suffered much, you see." She hoped for an outburst of compassion which did not come.

When they reached home, they went first to the study, where fire and lights awaited them, as they did upstairs. She would have preferred their bedroom at once; but Richard was determined to see her beside him, real, living flesh and blood, in the room where he had dreamed of her in such utter despair.

"This is where I was most unhappy. I would plant myself in that easy-chair and think of you, looking at the road and the bend in the river, above the bridge. What ghastly hours!"

She put aside her fur cloak, all wet with sleet, and standing straight before him, one hand on each shoulder, she said: "I have injured you, my dear husband; but I will atone for the injury by devotion and affection. Read what my eyes say, and have confidence in me. I owe you a very great deal, and I will pay my debt; you will see." — She tried, nervously, to draw him toward the brow she offered him. "Come to our room; come."

He repelled her, without anger, but very firmly.

"Go up alone; I shall stay here."

"Really, do you mean it?" she murmured, trembling so that he tried to find excuses for his cruelty.

"It is too strong for any argument. I cannot do it; I am afraid of making you too unhappy."

She held out her hand, resigned to whatever he wished.

"Good-night, then."

The stairs creaked under her boots, and he heard women's voices above. Then Rosine came

down and went to celebrate the carnival at the gardener's. He knew that Lydie was alone in her room; and, convulsed by an inward temptation, drawn this way and that by conflicting sentiments, he threw himself on the couch at last, to pass the night there, as he had done so many times in the absence of his beloved. But she was too near. How could he sleep, with the restlessness caused by her presence and their voluntary separation. He accused himself of stupidity, of folly, and remembered his neighbor's words: "It 's only a matter of an embrace." Twice he rose: "I am going to her," and checked himself with frantic tears. At last he could no longer resist, and went upstairs.

She was in their great low bed, the shaded lamp beside her casting its light on her arms, her shoulders, her neck, which were left bare amid the drapery of a dainty night-dress. When she saw him her beautiful pearl-gray eyes gleamed triumphantly, but she speedily dropped her eyelids, guided by feminine prudence.

"Not yet in bed?" she said, beckoning him prettily with her finger-tips. He approached the bed slowly, dissembling the dazzling sensation caused by the unconstraint with which that lovely body offered itself to him.

"Are n't you afraid of taking cold?" He spoke in a low tone, his mouth dry with longing. Then he added, suspiciously, "Before, you know, you used to sleep in high-necked chemises, what I used to call your *scaphanders.*"

"Yes, the kind we used in the dormitory at the orphanage. But I wanted to remind you of our night at Hôtel Favart." And with her arms around his neck, she whispered in his ear: "Bad boy, don't you see that I expected you?"

He closed his eyes, the better to resist, and rejoined, as if in a dream: "Ah! Hôtel Favart; what a night! But you can never give me that intoxicating bliss again."

"Why?"

"Because all these — " he pointed to her arms, her shoulders — "no longer belong to me alone. You gave them to another man."

He shook off her embrace with a fierce gesture, but she drew him back by the heart-broken tone in which she said, "So you think I am not punished enough, that all these have not sufficiently expiated my sin? Look." Beneath her throat, still firm and spotless, the wound in healing had left two or three deep scars in the mutilated flesh. "They had to probe very deep for the ball. Look at the mark they made — and if you knew how I suffered, in spite of their chloroform!"

"Poor darling!" said Richard, in a burst of pity. He leaned over the lovely, wrinkled flesh, and his lips breathed upon the scars. But he abruptly drew back, reflecting that she had suffered that martyrdom for another. — "Yes, for your lover, in a frenzy of despair because he no longer loved you."

"You are mistaken, Richard; I had no feeling left but hatred and contempt for the man of whom

you speak. Ask your mother, who watched me at night, and heard me call you in a delirium which told no lies. I thought only of you, who were always so kind; of the peaceful, happy life you offered me, and which I regretted with despair at my heart."

"Yes, I know, you are a good girl. You ask for nothing but to be allowed to love me, to give me that joy; but in spite of everything, if he, the other, were here, if he should call you, merely with a sign, you could not keep yourself from going to him."

"Hush! hush!"

But he kept on, lashed himself to a white heat of irony. "Why hush? it's very simple. I am a bashful, stammering fool; I don't dare, I don't know. But he knows so well, he is so handsome! Tell me, he sang you the Malaga ballad, didn't he? the sin of the eyes — did he teach you that? — that and all the others —"

"Richard, I implore you."

She tried to close his mouth, she had thrown her arms about him, when a blast on a hunting-horn out-of-doors brought him to his feet, deathly pale.

That was the method of communication with Grosbourg in the old days. Charlexis would announce that he was coming to dinner, Richard would reply in the same way; and the joyous flourishes from bank to bank, over the sounding-board of the river, enabled the two houses to meet and fraternize.

"Listen, Lydie."

His eyes were haggard, and he crushed her fingers as in a red-hot vise.

"Why, my dear, it 's at Clément's — it 's the gardener's apprentices."

"No, no; that comes from the terrace at Grosbourg. How it rings out over the water! — he knows that you have come home, and is signalling you in the old way. Do you hear?" And as the bugle poured forth its echoing blasts in the darkness, his frenzy rose higher and higher. "How he persists! How he must want you! To lie to-night with my wife! What 's that! — why, certainly, my dear prince. Wait, wait, till I answer him."

He darted into the hall, only to return a few moments later, ashamed, sobered as it were. Lydie was sitting on a chair, dressing, and sobbing bitterly. He knelt before her: "Where are you going? What do you mean to do?"

"Let me go; I cannot stay here. It is too horrible for you and for me. I will pass the night with your mother, and then, to-morrow, I will go away, as it is beyond your strength, dear."

She repulsed him now, in her turn, tried to defend herself against the embrace in which he enveloped her bare legs, the frantic kisses upon her drenched stockings. At last he lifted her up, carried her to the bed and began to soothe her, to coax her with loving words, which at times flashed up again and became shrieks of wrath.

"You must forgive me, you know. I am going mad. It is that miserable wretch."

"Why talk of him all the time, since it is all over; since he is dead to me?"

"Ah! we should be too happy if he were dead. But he lives, the monster; I can feel him prowling about you. Woe to him if I fall in with him! If I do, nothing, no one can prevent me from killing him."

"Prevent you? why, on the contrary, I will help you, for all the harm he has done me, that he is still doing me by depriving me of your love."

She clung to his neck, talked to him lip to lip, and when she had finished fell back, exhausted, on the pillow. He was almost angry with her for not struggling longer, convinced that everything depended on her, on the ardor of her desire, and that if her arms held him with more force he could not free himself. That idea betrayed him into a torrent of heart-broken, bitter sentences concerning Charlexis' perfection and his own inferiority, an incoherent, endless monologue, the wearying repetition of which at last began to tell upon himself.

The hunting-horn had ceased. Amid the pattering of the sleet on the windows, the clock of the Little Parish Church struck three. Richard paused eagerly beside the bed, a twofold current drawing him to and from it with equal force; and in a voice lowered to the soft accents of a prayer, he said:

"My wife, my child, let us have an end of this, I implore you! Tell me that I am mistaken;

that you no longer love him. Swear it, so that I may take you fearlessly in my arms. You see, you do not answer; you will promise nothing. Is it because you are still his? because a lie would cost you too dear? — Answer, Lydie; in pity's name, say something."

He leaned over her, and grasped her wrists, but felt that they were limp and lifeless in his hands. She was asleep — a heavy child's sleep, marked by a light rosy breath between her parted lips.

He had hated himself so for tormenting her with unkind words; but he might have kept on until morning, or even longer. She was asleep! He shook, at first, with bitter laughter, which gave place to a gentle, tender sentiment in face of that confessed weakness, that collapse after their scene. He softly pulled the bed-clothes over her shoulders and beautiful arms, and carried the lamp to the study, where he walked and walked, without pause, listening to the hours as they struck in the steeple of the church by the highroad, — the church of pity and of pardon, to which he would not have believed the approach to be so difficult.

When day broke behind the frost-covered windows, he went to place himself at his neighbor's disposal.

XIV.

ONE soft, misty May morning, Chuchin was rowing up the Seine, from Athis to Evry, in his fish-warden's skiff, with his official brass badge, seeking, along the shore, new places for his nets in the coming season. Simply by the way he floated along, by his easy fashion of handling the oars, by the habits of loitering and gossiping he had adopted, one could divine the master's absence, and an absence that had lasted a long while. The whole river belonged to the fish-warden. Barges floating down with the current passed him a drop to drink; he shouted obscene remarks, from a distance, to the wives of the bargemen and raftsmen, and the washerwomen on the great flat boat moored near the bridge, making more noise all by himself than all the buntings and wagtails on both banks. He had just passed the washerwomen, who threatened him with their beaters, when, on raising his head with the movement of the oars, he saw that dandified death's-head, M. Alexandre, leaning over the rail of the bridge.

Hidden in the shadow of the piles, Rosine's father ceased rowing for a moment, and communed silently with his short pipe, watching the

ex-steward. "What 's the old filibuster dawdling there for? To be sure, he don't lose a word of the gossip on the laundry-boat, the common washing-place of the commune; but M. Alexandre knows a thing or two himself; he could teach all those old scandal-mongers. No, he pretends to be looking down at the water, but his little eye 's squinting toward the railway station. He 's certainly expecting some one."

In two strokes he emerged from the shadow, and said, in his cracked, sneering old voice: —

"Are you trying the bait already, Père Alexandre? It 's a long while from now to the opening of the season."

The other seemed embarrassed and adjusted his eye-glasses, in order to gain time to consider his reply.

"You did n't know you were so near the truth, old Chuchin; I am watching a school of gudgeons that won't get into your nets." — He paused, as if listening for sounds from the railway; but what he took for the train for Paris was the groaning of the lock-gates in the distance. He leaned over toward the skiff, and continued: "What news is there at your place? Has n't the master come back from his Algeria yet?"

"Sly dog! as if Rosine did n't tell you everything that happens at the house."

M. Alexandre made a wry face. He avoided speaking of Rosine with her father, from a feeling of delicacy which that boor did not understand; perhaps, also, because he feared unpleasant conse-

quences. "Look, Chuchin," he cried, to change the conversation, "there 's your tenant going to his cellar." Père Georges had, in fact, come out of his cabin, blinking at the bright light reflected by the water, tottering on his legs, and holding in both hands a fishing-pole of interminable length.

"Good-for-naught!" growled the keeper, with the contemptuous hatred of the peasant for the man who can no longer work; "that was a bright idea, to furnish lodgings for that old bag of rags. But what the devil 's he going to do with his pole? The fishing is n't open."

"Don't you see that he has a bottle fastened to the end? He 's getting in his stock of Seine water; just watch him! is n't he funny?"

The bank being very high, the old man had devised that means of reaching the river. But the water was low; he was obliged to stretch himself out, to lie on his stomach in the helpless struggles of his old carcass. Alexandre and Chuchin were much amused by the pantomime.

"He 'll split his skin."

"He 's full to the brim; his head will drag him over, sure. Hallo! take care, Père Georges. *V'lan!* there you go!"

A cry of distress, wild and desperate, one of those hoarse outcries in which a man expends all his vitality, woke the echoes of both banks. The commotion among the reeds on the shore showed where the old man had fallen, headforemost; and some peasants, who were at work in a

field near by, succeeded, not without difficulty, in pulling him out of the water. When they had put him on the bank, shivering and drenched, still holding his pole in his clenched fingers, then, and not until then, did the keeper, who had thought for a moment that he was rid of his tenant, pull to the spot with a few strokes, and hypocritically offer his assistance.

At the same time the Paris train left the station, and Sautecœur's daughter-in-law appeared at the end of the bridge, in her light summer dress with pink stripes, which the breeze from the river blew against her legs. She had accompanied her husband to the train, escorted by a stout lady, short and panting for breath, who was wheeling a baby-carriage, — Mme. Noël, wife of a professor at a college in Paris, who had hired a chamber at the Hermitage to give her infant daughter a breath of the health-giving odor of the woods. As soon as she spied the ex-steward's blue suit, La Sautecœur's face changed; and, asking Mme. Noël to wait for her at the foot of the hill, she tremblingly approached M. Alexandre, who leaned against the railing of the bridge, without moving, and watched her coming toward him. A few words were rapidly exchanged in a low tone.

"The prince at Grosbourg — appointment in the forest — Chêne-Prieur."

"Impossible — too closely watched."

"The Indian?"

"Yes. He wears my life out."

People passed, — country people, tradesmen. The baker bowed to them from under the hood of his wagon. The butcher's boy, on horseback, with a large basket of meat across his white apron, turned to smile at them; and M. Alexandre pretended to be describing, in a very loud tone, the accident to Père Georges, pointing, with earnest gestures, to the crushed and broken reeds, to the hut where they had taken the poor old man. — "Ah! I really thought they would have to call Foucart's wagon." Then, in a lower tone: "To-morrow, Thursday, at Corbeil market — at eleven o'clock, the jeweller's on Rue Saint-Spire — you can select the jewels together."

"I don't know — I can't promise," whispered the tall girl in an uncertain tone, her eyes on the horizon, where Évry lock was discharging its torrent. She added, for the benefit of those who were within hearing: "Poor Père Georges! a hemorrhage at his age! Thanks, Monsieur Alexandre."

"Madame — "

The laundresses below, who had not allowed the activity of their beaters amid the echoes of the bridge to interfere with their following attentively the mysterious portion of this short dialogue, when they saw M. Alexandre bring it to a close by throwing a kiss with his finger-tips deafened the old beau with their invectives. That rake-hell of an Alexandre! So La Chuchin was n't enough for him; now it was La Saute-cœur. However, it ran in the family: the Indian

was always the most famous cuckold in the province; now his son was following suit. And they banged their clothes-beaters and laughed until they split their dresses.

With no suspicion that that music was for her, Sautecœur's daughter rejoined her companion at the foot of the slope; and, while assisting her to push her little carriage, suggested that they should go together to Corbeil market the next day. They would harness Blanche to a neighbor's carriole.

She herself would drive — a lovely road through the woods; it would do the little girl no end of good. "But my father-in-law must think that it 's your idea. He is too suspicious of his daughter-in-law, as he is of all women, for that matter. You are the only exception; I don't know why. Before you came to stay with us, he would n't let me walk in the forest without my husband. — You can tell him you have some shopping to do. We 'll have a good time, I promise you."

If Père Sautecœur displayed too much distrust, Mme. Noël certainly displayed too little. For a month past the good woman, as innocently as possible, had connived at the villainous designs of Charlexis on his lieutenant's wife. That broad, honest nurse's face, and the title of college professor borne by her husband reassured the keeper so completely that he laid aside his habits of suspicion and espionage. The two friends went out alone every day, carried the little girl, folding-chairs, and some luncheon, and established them-

selves at the *rondpoint* of the Chêne-Prieur, in a preserve which was not in the Indian's district. The ladies talked and sewed, and read the *Petit Journal* aloud, mingling the news items with the rustling of insects in the underbrush and the humming of birds in the tree-tops. After an hour of repose, Mme. Sautecœur would suggest walking a little, and would end by taking a turn in the forest alone, her corpulent friend being especially fond of not moving about.

By the old grass-grown park walls, pierced here and there by high gates, which skirt that part of the forest of Sénart, stretches as far as the eye can see a tract of velvety grass, caressed by the low-hanging branches which move to and fro in the faintest breath, like Bengal punkahs. At the farther end of one of those immense, mysterious lawns, a great parasol of light-brown silk always awaited the young woman in the same spot, as if it had been forgotten, and under that parasol, which covered him completely, handsome Charlexis comfortably stretched out in the rich grass. The door of the Hermitage being closed to him since the keeper had caught him kissing his daughter-in-law, he had improvised this camp of assignation, a really dangerous and precarious retreat, where they could exchange only furtive kisses, awkward endearments, in haste and apprehension. A better opportunity would doubtless grow out of their meeting at the market.

When the Hermitage carriole crossed the long bridge of Corbeil the next morning, the little

town, ordinarily silent and deserted, was swarming with noise and bustle. Huddled compactly about its old cloister, on the left bank of the Seine, the gardens laid out in terraces opposite, and the gradual levelling of the perspectives, gave it a vague look of Bâle, in the neighborhood of the Münster, — but Bâle on a day of cantonal competitions, invaded by all the outlying villages and farms.

On the market-place and in the neighboring streets was a tangled mass of rustic vehicles of all sorts, making circulation very difficult. La Sautecœur drove hers into the cloister of Saint-Spire, a calm and deserted spot, in the very heart of the town, always cool because of the breeze that circulates around the old church, and told Mme. Noël to wait for her until she had made her purchases. "If the little one is tired, you can go into the church. There 's a beautiful knight carved out of stone." And with that she ran away, with beaming face, to keep her appointment.

The prince, who had arrived before her, was in a corner of the crowded shop, selecting earrings, an empty chair all ready beside his own. She sat down in it, and, pressing close to each other, they talked in low tones, turning the earrings on a little square of black velvet, while all around them farmers from Morsang, whose sons were about to be married, accompanied by bands of kinsfolk and acquaintances, haggled over the wedding jewels with jests and loud laughter, umbrellas

and lofty head-dresses, so that you would have thought you were at the Palais-Royal on an evening when some side-splitting Labicherie was in progress. But the lovers had something better to do than make merry. The Indian was ordered out for night duty that night, with the whole staff of forest keepers.

"I will be at the Hermitage at ten o'clock. Leave your chamber window open."

"Oh! I beg you not. No, I am afraid!"

"Afraid of what? Your husband's in Paris; the old man will not come home until six in the morning. We must look out and not go to sleep; but we shall hardly care to do that. Just think, a night — a whole night to ourselves, for the first time."

He spoke into her neck, into her hair, while she was trying on her new jewels. The wedding-party had gone. The shopkeeper and her sister, faces of the Middle Ages, wan and faded, relics of an old, exhausted race, a type frequently seen in Seine-et-Oise, approached the prince, bowing to the ground, and asked if Monseigneur had chosen what he required.

"Yes, Madame Souchotte, — this complete set, which I will come, myself, and get to-night."

Sautecœur's daughter rose, blushing and ready to go, just as a fine landau stopped in front of the shop, which was very dark already, and was made still darker, as by the unfurling of a great awning over its window. — "Madame Fénigan's carriage," said the shopkeeper, in a respectful tone,

although somewhat less humble than that in which she addressed Charlexis. Oh! key-board of the honest tradesman, a hundred times more delicately shaded than the Chinese gamut!— The prince did not stir, did not turn his head; but the expression of his smile changed, became wicked, as he saw a tall, graceful woman's figure enter the shop.

"Is my watch ready?" Lydie had not strength to finish her question. Whether she would or no, a nervous cough strangled her voice. She had not seen him since the Monte-Carlo farce, the rupture and the flight; and behold! the tarnished mirror of a jeweller's shop unexpectedly exhibited to her that pretty face, instinct with impudence and rascality. She had a rapid, complicated sensation: disgust, terror, wrath; and at the same time joy, at finding no touch of regret mingled therewith, and at being able to banish, at last, an uncertainty which sometimes disturbed her when she asked herself: "What will my feeling be when I see him again?"

Great God! if she had ever loved him, it was all over now. And that Sautecœur, with her eyes like red-hot coals and her faubourg impudence, was very wrong to glare at her so fiercely. Her watch was ready; she took it, and went out without a word. But, when her mother-in-law saw her distressed features, she cried: "What has happened to you?"

"Such an unfortunate meeting!" murmured Lydie, taking her seat beside her. And, in a

low voice, because of the coachman, who was tying himself into a knot to listen, she named Charlexis. — "Ah! I ought never to have come to this market."

"It was my fault, dear child. But you never go out, and I was anxious that you should have a breath of fresh air for once."

"I had a presentiment that something would happen."

The mother's expression showed her alarm: "That something would happen?"

"Oh! nothing of the sort that you might well fear from a mad fool like me. No, I love my husband; I shall never love any man but my husband — but how can I tell him whom I met?"

"Let us keep it to ourselves. When everything is going so well, and Mérivet sends us such good news! We might, perhaps, delay his cure and his return."

"Then we must lie — not tell him everything as I agreed to do, and as I have not once failed to do since he has been in Algeria."

While they were talking, the carriage proceeded at a foot-pace through the crowded, narrow, noisy little streets, stopped at the druggist's, the stationer's, the saddler's, the trellis-maker's, — all of whom came out to the door for orders, and helped to fill, with packages and bottles, the seat and the box upon which Libert moved restlessly in his long cape; and it was a genuine woman's conversation, profoundly confidential and sentimental, interrupted by household matters, by fre-

quent stops and bargainings with tradespeople. In front of the pastry-cook's, where the landau had stopped to give orders for Sunday, the magistrate Delcrous, handsomely dressed and gloved, with glossy beard and gleaming teeth, appeared at the carriage door. They had not seen him at Uzelles for months; but he was just about to eat a hasty breakfast at the pastry-cook's, preparatory to taking the train and calling upon the ladies, having something very important, very urgent, to ask them.

"Very well! get in, and come back to breakfast with us," said the mother; and as he gladly took his seat opposite them, among the packages, Lydie, a little embarrassed by the presence of one of their friends of the old days, looked at the little tables, all laid, behind the windows in the dark pastry-shop, and asked, with an assumed air of interest: "So this is where you take your meals?"

"Yes, Madame, only two steps from my office. The courtroom is at the end of the street, on the little square by the mill."

She continued to look about absent-mindedly, having no suspicion of the important part those places were destined to play in her future.

"You think this a dismal little place, Mesdames, I doubt not? And so do I. And this is why, if I may rely on your sympathy. — By the way, what news from Algeria? When does our friend Richard return?"

"My son will return soon, dear Monsieur Del-

crous; but you know that, in his absence, if my daughter and I can be of any service to you — "

The magistrate bowed and smiled. He would explain himself when they were away from the market and the tumult.

The landau left Corbeil, drawn by its strong horses at a steady trot, leaving behind the mammoth chimneys of the flour-mills, whose smoke darkened one whole quarter of the glorious sky. Carts, pedestrians, cattle, the joyous confusion of a return from market, hastened along the high cliff-road, between the gleaming river below and fields of wheat and barley rolling away in a green swell to the horizon. A carriole driven by two women, passing swiftly by, and swaying from side to side, grazed their wheels. Lydie recognized Sautecœur's daughter-in-law, and looked long and pityingly after the humble carriole as it jolted along the rough roads. Ah! how she would have liked to call out to her, to warn her of the quagmires, of the irreparable falls that awaited her. But the little vehicle went so fast, it was already so far away, almost at the edge of the woods, — the dark and motionless woods on the horizon!

In the opposite direction came a tinkling of little bells, a great cloud of dust, in which appeared a calèche drawn by horses at a gallop, postilions in the blue livery of the d'Alcantaras, and the pretty Jewesses from the Château of Mérogis, accompanied by the Prince d'Olmütz, with his diamond-like eyes, his implacable smile

like a young rajah's, watching the well fill up with lovely pink and white female flesh. When the equipage had disappeared there was a painful silence for a few moments in the Fénigans' landau. "How lucky Richard was not here!" the women thought. Delcrous wondered if it would be prudent, after that meeting, to risk the step for which he had come. A roadside episode made a welcome diversion.

As they were ascending the hill from Soisy, two little girls with tow-colored hair, from a gypsy van that had halted in a neighboring field, offered baskets for sale made of rushes and water-grasses. Although the hill was steep, the coachman, impelled by a professional hatred of beggars, lashed his horses just as Lydie put out her hand toward one of the little baskets. Mme. Fénigan, who saw her daughter-in-law's gesture, called to him to stop, but in vain; and for five minutes they heard the little girls gasping for breath behind the carriage, and the pattering of their little bare feet on the dusty road. At last the coachman was obliged to stop, in obedience to his mistress's repeated orders. Lydie, thanking her mother-in-law, was feeling for her purse to pay for her trifling purchase; but Madame Fénigan had already filled the little outstretched hands with silver pieces.

"Does that surprise you, Monsieur Delcrous?" she asked the magistrate.

"Indeed, Madame, you used to have a marked antipathy for gypsies, which, by the way, I share.

I remember having had a discussion with your son concerning this same Corbeil road."

"True. Élise was of the party that day."

"Precisely," said Delcrous, his face beaming at the memory of little Red-Riding-Hood. And he added, showing his sharp, separated wolf's teeth: "As you have mentioned that charming person's name — "

The carriage rolled along between woods and vine-clad slopes. The air was fragrant with the scent of eglantine in bloom. The magistrate considered the place and the hour favorable for his revelation. He had had enough of living alone, in the dark, gloomy corner the ladies had just seen. And they only knew Corbeil as it was on market-days; they could not imagine the ordinary torpor of that little town where, after eight o'clock in the evening, every house was closed, every light out, where the sound of a carriage passing through Rue Notre Dame called forth on every floor the remark: "Monsieur le Président is returning home from court," or, "the omnibus for the Belle-Image is going to the station." There were no clubs, no salons, no possible distraction outside of work. The only advantage was that Paris was less than an hour distant by rail, and he could conveniently go to Place Vendôme two or three times a week, to make the circuit of the bureaus, to keep an eye out for the promotion which would help him to make an advantageous marriage. Moreover, he was tired of hearing the waiter at the Couverchel

cookshop announce: "Monsieur le Juge's dinner." — And ever since he met the cousin from Lorient, that pretty, laughing face, over which grief had passed without leaving a wrinkle, had never been out of his mind. Élise, when he had questioned her seriously one evening, had postponed her answer to the next day; and the next day she had gone away. After months of waiting and hesitation, he had just written her a letter, very concise and sincere, setting forth his position, his future prospects; and now he begged Mme. Fénigan to intercede in his favor.

"I will gladly do so," she replied. "Life at Corbeil is not very lively for a young woman; but our cousin does n't have much enjoyment at Lorient; and then, we shall be here to help you amuse her. I promise to write her."

"And you will allow me to add a few lines to your letter," said Lydie; "for I have learned to know and love dear Élise."

"Ah! Mesdames, Mesdames, how can I thank you?" murmured the magistrate, blushing with pleasure under his thick, close-trimmed black whiskers. And all the way to the Château they embellished the projected marriage with schemes for pleasure-parties at the Vieux-Garçon, at Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois, and hunting and fishing-parties.

"You must be married at Sainte-Irène," suggested Lydie, playfully. She checked herself, somewhat embarrassed; but Delcrous was not susceptible.

"As Madame Élise is a divorcée," he observed calmly, "there will be no marriage in church; and I am sorry for it. It would have been delightful, in that little country church. — By the way," he added, turning to Mme. Fénigan, "I hear that your friend, the curé of Draveil, has been superseded."

"Oh! he has been no friend of mine for a long while. I never forgave him for his bitter persecution of Abbé Cérès, a worthy priest — "

She could not help laughing at Delcrous' expression of stupefaction, for she had never before mentioned the incumbent of the Little Parish Church in his presence, except with profound contempt. "What would you have? All my ideas have changed. I am no longer the same woman. How did that happen? Perhaps I will tell you some day. It may be of service to you on occasion."

They adjourned to the salon after breakfast; Lydie was playing one of Chopin's preludes, of which the melodious strains aroused a noisy linnet in the great paulownia which shaded the main entrance to the château, when there was a ring at the gate. From the table at which she was writing to Élise, Mme. Fénigan saw visitors enter the courtyard, and hastily left her seat.

"Lydie, my child, close your piano. Here is Abbé Cérès with another priest; doubtless, the new curé come to call upon us."

"Is that the Monsieur Cérès of whom so many

marvellous things are told?" said the magistrate, approaching the window, where the two women joined him, keeping discreetly out of sight behind the curtain.

The priests walked slowly, talking with an indifferent air, that seemed, to some extent, affected, — especially in the case of M. le Curé, a plump little man, whose red cheeks, closely-shaven double chin and black pelerine gave him the appearance of one of those stout, serene, prosperous widows whom we meet so often. He stopped in front of one of the two large round boxes on either side of the stoop, to call his vicar's attention to a clump of roses; while M. Cérès, who had held his hat in his hand since they passed through the gate, inclined his white head and robust figure, listening with childlike deference to the words of his superior, who was at least twenty years his junior. And that was the rebellious priest, the untamable Lucifer whose pride they proposed to crush by five months' seclusion at the Trappist convent.

"Bless my soul! the incumbent of the Little Parish Church doesn't look like a rich man."

That observation, in an undertone, was almost involuntary on Delcrous's part, he was so impressed by the contrast between the two cassocks crossing the courtyard in the bright sunlight, — one as glossy and jet black as the other was rusty, and worn, and threadbare. But the contracted brow of Mme. Fénigan, the tone in which she said: "He is a saint," cut short the magistrate's

ready jests; he even restrained a strong desire to laugh when the vicar, as soon as the door of the salon was opened and the visitors announced by the servant, rushed forward, running into and overturning everything in his way, in order to enter first. At the moment no one understood the meaning of that tumultuous entrance; and the angry glance which his hierarchical superior cast upon him completely disconcerted Abbé Cérès, naturally so humble and so timid, whose ignorance of social laws was so dense that he believed that in society, as in a religious procession, the inferior should always go first, the choir-boy before the deacon, the deacon before the priest, the priest before the bishop. Here, unfortunately, notwithstanding all his haste, he did not succeed in arriving first. "And now Monsieur le Curé is angry," thought the poor man, as he made his bow. "I must be careful, when we go out, not to be so rude again."

That preoccupation gave a wandering expression to his bright eyes — two blue spots in his sunburned face — while he admired his curé's fine manners, his way of bowing, of taking his seat, of congratulating Mme. Fénigan on the splendors of her collection of roses, her Maréchal Niels, her Gloire-de-Dijon, and also of talking music with Mme. Richard, of analyzing Wagner and Schumann like a consummate *dilettante.* And so, when Lydie, who had become, as a result of her sojourn in cosmopolitan hotels, a great reader of foreign novels, introduced the names of

Tolstoï, Ibsen, Meredith, and Dostoïewski into the conversation, the new curé proved that these authors, although not as familiar to him as his breviary, were certainly no strangers to him.

"What a man!" said the honest, ingenuous eyes of Abbé Cérès, as they rested in ecstasy on his superior's smug, pink-cheeked face. But the curé, little touched by that mute admiration, thought that he might extort some amusement from it, and abruptly asked the poor vicar his opinion of Dostoïewski. The old priest's brown cheeks became a brick-red; his whole face revealed such dismay that Delcrous took pity on him.

"Monsieur l'Abbé Cérès probably has no time to read," he said in his authoritative, court-room tone; "he has too many poor people to visit and relieve."

The humble priest, distressed by those eulogistic words, which seemed to him to detract from the merits of his superior, moved uneasily on his chair, and faltered, in his hoarse mountaineer's voice, that he was no more deserving than others; that he, too, wasted time in reading.

"Nonsense, Cérès; you can't make me believe that you have read Dostoïewski," persisted M. le Curé; and his pelerine rose and fell with his hearty laugh.

"Well, yes, I have read him. Monsieur Mérivet lent him to me; indeed, I detest your Dostoïewski."

"You detest him? Why, I pray to know?"

queried the curé, thunderstruck, like all the others. It is true that the rustic priest seemed hardly the man to understand the author of the Karamazoffs, or to bear him ill-will for any theory he may have put forth.

"I detest him for having made Russian pity fashionable."

"Russian pity? What do you mean by that, my dear abbé?"

"I mean that unjust pity which is bestowed only on knaves and strumpets, which we feel only for the miseries of the galleys and other vile places, as if misfortune were touching only in crime and degradation. That is what I call Russian pity. We have all known worthy workingmen's wives, who have worn themselves out taking care of the house and the little ones; who have endured privations and blows without complaining; and when Dostoïewski throws his Rodion at the feet of a harlot, who symbolizes all human misery in his eyes, I consider that he dishonors poverty and slanders mankind."

The priest's voice, freed from its hesitation, rang out melodious and strong. As he proceeded, his expression, as well as his gestures, acquired confidence, — the breadth and freedom of the pulpit; and Lydie, who knew him only by having seen his threadbare cassock glisten and shrink in the sun, was able now to understand the enthusiasm of her mother-in-law and old Mérivet.

"You know that that form of pity originated with us, Monsieur l'Abbé," said Jean Delcrous.

"It dates from '48; you will find it in the novels of Victor Hugo, Mme. Sand, and Eugène Sue. The Russians simply borrowed it from us, refining it to suit their complicated nerves. All the same, Dostoïewski's Sonia belongs to the same family with Fantine."

The judge, overjoyed to show the ladies that he was no more lacking in reading or in eloquence than the others, raised his head, and inflated his voice as at the Palais de Justice; but the end of his speech was lost in a scene of confusion. Monsieur le Curé, considering that the call had lasted long enough, had suddenly risen, saluted the mistress of the house, and started for the door, before the vicar observed his departure. "Ah! *mon Dieu!*" said the poor fellow, "again my thoughts were elsewhere." — He leaped across the salon, stumbled over a stool, overturned chairs, and, grasping his stout little curé by the arms just as he was going out, exclaimed, "No, I will not permit it. I know too well what I owe to my superior." — He lifted him roughly out of the way, and rushed out on the stoop, where he arrived a good first, with a triumphant gesture.

"What a funny old fellow! Why is he always in such a hurry?" Delcrous asked Lydie and her mother in an undertone, as they watched the two priests walking away. The curé's pelerine fluttered frantically with his vehement, fulminating gestures, while the vicar escorted him, crestfallen and dismayed under a terrible lesson on social proprieties, which profited him little; for,

when they met the postman dismounting from his bicycle at the gate, he stopped, absent-minded and compassionate as always, to ask him about his sick wife. They heard the curé's testy, nervous voice: "When you are ready, Abbé!" followed by the protestations of the hapless Cérès as he disappeared in a whirl of dust and angry words.

"Our poor vicar!" said Mme. Fénigan; "that is not the man to make his life smooth."

Lydie made no reply, being engrossed by a letter from Richard, announcing his own and Mérivet's return on the following Tuesday. "In three days, mamma! he will be here in three days!" The joyful tone, the way in which she threw her arms around her mother-in-law's neck indicated such perfect sincerity that the magistrate said to himself, as he returned to Corbeil at nightfall, "Marriage certainly is a solid institution. To think that those people can still live happily together after such a strain!"

Thus the world judges, seeing of men and things only the deceitful appearances, and never imagining what lies underneath. In the immediate circle of the Fénigans, among those who approved or blamed the husband's indulgence, the pardon he had generously granted, how few suspected that the drama was still in progress, more intense, more heart-rending than ever! how few suspected the explanation of Richard's long journey and the letters, distressing in their cruel monotony, which the husband and wife had been

exchanging for two months! Especially in the beginning, absence and separation, which usually evoke images so favorable to love, sharpened, on the contrary, the husband's jealous excitement. The thought that the prince was at Grosbourg, that they might meet, might see each other again, led to a repetition in interminable letters, written in feverish, almost illegible handwriting, of the scene of the night preceding his departure: "Why did you love him? Swear that you love him no longer!" — And she swore it, covered whole pages with protestations, exhausted all known forms of oaths.

At last, however, the beautiful, varied scenery of the Algerian Sahel, and, much more than the scenery, upon which his bourgeois glances hardly rested, the coursing, the lying in wait for game, and the long rides, followed by dreamless slumbers in his tent, relaxed the tension on Richard Fénigan's nerves, and turned his mind aside from the fixed idea. The tone of his letters changed; they became firmer and more assured, like the voice of a convalescent. One day Mérivet wrote: "He is getting better." — And after a little while Richard confirmed him: "I am entirely well." Very soon came the letter announcing his return on the following Tuesday.

Sitting on a bench, in the silence and solitude of the park, Lydie read and re-read the dear letter, filled with loving words, with happy projects. The day was drawing to a close, the air was mild and soft, and what one could see of the sky

between the branches changed from deep blue to a soft, pale green. Perfect weather to hope and to trust. Suddenly, behind a clump of trees close at hand, she heard a woman's voice scolding, — a savage voice which it was impossible to recognize, so transformed was it by passion: "Go and hide yourself, hussy! Pretty actions for a married woman! You ought to be ashamed, you dirty baggage!"

Lydie had risen, in dire alarm, thinking that the insulting words were addressed to her; but she saw Rosine Chuchin clinging with both hands to the bars of the gate leading into the forest, and vomiting her wrath in the direction of a pink-striped dress and an umbrella flying into the woods. The washerwomen had told of M. Alexandre's long colloquy with La Sautecœur, and, in her jealousy of her old lover, an intrigue between them seemed the more probable, because she had noticed the woman for several days, prowling about in little Sénart, on the outskirts of Uzelles, whither Alexandre constantly came. Lydie's presence did not stop her; she called upon her to witness the creature's impudence and infamous behavior. "What do you think of such a brazen-faced creature, Madame? — to come to our houses and take our men from us!"

"Are you married, my poor Rosine?"

"No, madame, but there are things almost as painful. If she thinks I 'll let her do as she pleases! It is n't her idiot of a husband that I 'll warn, but her father-in-law, the Indian, and

she 'll have to settle with him. You shall pay dear for it, trollop!"

But in the wood road, deliciously peaceful in that closing hour of the day, there was no movement save the leaping of a young rabbit, or the fluttering of a pheasant frightened by her loud voice. Lydie, amazed to find so much passion in that peasant girl, whom she thought to be a sleepy, stolid creature, a genuine mountain-rat, tried to argue with her: "It would be a terrible thing to tell the father-in-law, — a savage creature, you know very well. But I know you, — you won't do it; you are not unkind."

Rosine shook her head.

"No, but I am jealous, — oh! so jealous! It 's a disease like hydrophobia, d' ye see, Madame; you are bitten, and you want to bite. You suffer, and you make others suffer."

Her vulgar face became beautiful, flushed and convulsed by passion as it was; and Lydie Fénigan saw, with terror, in that peasant girl's face something like a threat or a presage, that painful expression which she knew so well, which reminded her of so many wretched hours.

XV.

THE PRINCE'S JOURNAL.

I KNOW now why my family exiled me so long from Grosbourg. It seems that Mme. F——'s husband, who had taken his wife's kidnapping like a philosopher, became white-hot with anger when he learned that she was cast off. M. Poum-poum's threats alarmed my mother; she fancied me drowned, hanged, impaled, scalped, and did not feel at all safe until she knew that I was under the safeguard of my cousin de Boutignan and the invincible 50th Dragoons. What has happened among our neighbors at Uzelles while we were performing the grand manœuvres? I am assured that Madame has returned to her husband's domicile, that Poum-poum has sailed away to Algeria, and there is no one who can give me the key to that twofold mystery. The most essential fact is that the colonel has restored me to my family, with leave of absence renewable indefinitely.

The family is not very lively: the duchess always going back and forth about this interminable succession; the general more and more stationary, like those mythological personages whom

Virgil and Ovid introduce to us, pursued by the wrath of some god, and transformed into trees or rocks. From hour to hour the painful sheath of stone, of bark, which encases him, rises higher and higher. Soon there will be nothing living about him except the head, then the eyes — those wrathful black eyes — in which the light takes refuge, like the setting sun on an attic window. His mind is still intact, and his speech; but he uses them only to describe his malady in despairing phrases. Everything that he says is savage, and gleams and nips and cuts like a surgical instrument; and yet, if we must believe him, his faculties are becoming numb, Master Jean's violoncello no longer tickles his nerves so voluptuously as it used. To be sure, Master Jean himself is getting rather short of breath; when he speaks to you, you fancy that you are deaf; he gives you the sensation of listening to him in another room. Perhaps his violoncello is becoming voiceless like himself.

Yesterday afternoon we three were talking together on the terrace by the river. "Make me a cigarette," the general said to me between his teeth. As I rolled it, I suppose that I glanced at his great, lifeless hands, which were curled up on his knees like dead leaves. His ill-humor showed itself more plainly.

"What 's the matter with my hands? They 're not so white as Madame F——'s." And as soon as he had pronounced the name he lost his head, reproached me for my base conduct toward that

woman, accused me of going back to her, and shouted at me, his mouth distorted with jealousy: "I forbid it, do you hear? I forbid it!" in the imperious tone in which he would command the troops to march past the presidential tribune at Longchamps. To that I retorted:

"You forbid it? By what right?"

"By the right of a father — by the right of the head of the family."

You remember, my dear Vallongue, that your last letter treated of the principle of authority and how universally it is disregarded. I recalled a few of your most impressive, most eloquent periods, and used them on the general as if they came out of my own head.

When I told him that the family kept step with the State, that it had been monarchical in imitation of the State, then liberal monarchical, and finally was becoming democratic with it, you cannot conceive the dismay, the confusion of my illustrious father, faithfully reflected on Master Jean's melancholy features.

The root of the matter is that the general is still thinking of our pretty neighbor, and nearly expires with rage on his pedestal as soon as he sees me cross the bridge, being fully convinced that I am prowling about Uzelles. On my word of honor, I had not met Mme. F—— since the rupture, until this morning we came face to face in a jeweller's shop at Corbeil. She seemed to me to have grown a little thin; she had the same indolent grace, and a pallor which I attributed to

the shock of the meeting. Not a word — hardly a look — and that was all. Indeed, I can assure you that that will be all; for if I am accused of returning to Uzelles, it is because the assignations with my little Sautecœur are almost always in that part of the forest which skirts the Fénigans' park. I have told you how closely she is watched, dear little girl, and that she has a frantic fear of the Indian, thanks to whom we are still at the stage of unimportant endearments. That is why, doubtless, my caprice is being transformed to a miniature passion, and why no woman in society, great lady or bourgeoise, has ever stirred my pulses like this little nectarine.

Pretty? that is the most that can be said: a large mouth, a little Montmartre nose, the gawky elegance of a shop-girl with a big band-box. When Mme. F—— came into the jeweller's shop this morning, where we were selecting a gold chain, she hurled all her scorn at me in a glance, which said: "So this is what you have come to? — I congratulate you." Unluckily I had no opportunity for any other reply than an expressive glance, and that was not enough to explain myself.

You see, Wilkie, young as I am, I have almost completed my experiments with women, especially so far as the French woman is concerned. In the first place, where does the French woman stand? Of what type is she? Is she the cold-blooded, capricious libertine described by the petty romances of the eighteenth century? Has

she ever roared and panted like the Malvinas of romantic Young France? Shall we find her rather among the pensive cattle of the Parnassian poets or among the instinctive creations of Naturalism, the mystic neurotics of the Decadents? She may have been all these, or, at least, have fancied that she was — a manikin for novelists, an obliging and adaptable trier-on of all the most eccentric styles; but I suspect her of remaining, at heart, a creature of feigned passion, — a libertine without conviction, of being almost invariably the mother, the mamma, and nothing more. In these last three years and more that I have been disporting myself in women's arms, that is the sort of woman whom I have encountered most frequently. That has something to do with my age, you will say. But here, at Grosbourg, I am constantly thrown in with very young girls or young women, our neighbors at Mérogis, in whom I feel sure that everything is pretence, impulse, or fashion, except the loving, protecting instinct of maternity. Now, Sautecœur is of another sort: a quivering little mortal, a creature of folly and desire, — not the aristocratic beauty of the countess, nor the red-haired Jewess type of Rebecca Dollinger; but I know that something attracts me to her, something the like of which I have never known before. I will tell you to-morrow, my dear fellow, and I leave my journal open for that purpose, whether I have made an error in my diagnosis.

Why to-morrow? Because, by dint of astute

management, I have been able to make sure of one night — one good long night all to ourselves, in a real bed, and not under the uncertain shelter of a parasol, — by persuading the head keeper to organize a grand expedition against the poachers, whose boldness is becoming intolerable. Being summoned to the pheasant-house this evening with the whole force of great and little Sénart, the Indian will not return to the Hermitage before six o'clock to-morrow morning. You can imagine whether we shall make the most of the opportunity.

I inclose the crayon sketch of my very precious phiz, which Chevalier Borski, forger, of the 50th Dragoons, began. As you will see, it was already very like me. But, by virtue of that law of subjectivity which we were talking about one day, and which compels my stout tailor, in spite of all that I can say to him, to make his customers' waistcoats too big, the passionate Borski has given my eyes the expression of frenzied ardor which blazed in his, and the whole expression of my face is changed by it. I saw the unlucky fellow once more in the courtyard, at headquarters, the morning that he marched across the parade ground, after his sentence to penal servitude. That depressing and theatrical ceremony of degradation, under a rainy sky, in that black-walled square, among men and horses drenched with rain, seemed to me to make very little impression on him. When he passed me, his cape thrown back over his shoulders, his head erect, I

was struck by the far-awayness of his glances and his thoughts. You felt that he was a thousand leagues from all prisons, smiling ecstatically at the woman who made him a criminal. It is that passionate flame that he has given me in the sketch, very inappropriately.

No, no! there is no flame in the eyes of our generation, is there, Vallongue? We no longer burn either for love or for the fatherland. Whose is the fault? You, my philosopher, deep thinker, delver, devourer of old books, have drowned your warmth and your rays in the fogs of German metaphysics; you accuse books of having taught you too much, and dried you up too soon. But in that case, we others, we crabs, who do not read, ought to have kept alight the flame of honest beliefs; but we have done nothing of the sort. Probably it is not necessary to open the heavy books which have disenchanted you, to be familiar with their contents; the despairing ideas which they contained in germ, as it were, have been reduced to formulæ and scattered abroad, and we breathe them in with air and life, absorb them through every pore. Not once have you quoted to me one of the thrilling, heart-rending axioms of your philosophers, that I have not said to myself: "Why, I know that." That is one of the same inexplicable phenomena which transmit the news of a great event from one end of the desert to the other, in a single day, without one's being able to understand the process of transmission. This is why all of us of the last shipload,

that of the conquest, whether ignorant like me, or learned like you, are stricken down by ennui and exhaustion, conquered before the battle, — all of us with the minds of anarchists who have lacked the courage to act.

. . . . . .

CHARLEXIS.

XVI.

UPON landing at Marseille, where he proposed to remain a day or two for the final adjustment of his affairs, old Mérivet was very much surprised to find Richard determined to leave him and start at once for Paris.

"Tell me why?" Napoléon asked, as he accompanied his capricious travelling companion from the steamboat to the railway station. "You wrote that we should arrive Tuesday or Wednesday; what will you gain by putting it forward a day? Nobody will expect you, there'll be no carriage for you."

"That is just what I want," said Richard, blushing at his involuntary confession. Mérivet was alarmed, and said, with a vehement gesture which would have made the whole Boulevard des Italiens turn to look after him, but which passed unnoticed amid so many similar gestures on the noisy sidewalks of La Canebière:

"Why, you poor fellow, have you got no farther than that? To conceal your return, to try to surprise your wife. And I was fool enough to believe you were cured at last! Look you, it would serve you right if, when you arrive —" But he had not

the heart to finish in face of Richard's emotion. "Well, a pleasant journey to you, foolish boy; and as you will see them before I do, embrace your mother and your wife for their old friend."

It was not jealousy alone that impelled Richard to return home twenty-four hours earlier than he was expected. He was eager to press Lydie to his heart, but dared not confess it to Mérivet, and admit that, after he had endured separation from his wife for more than a year, to do without her another day seemed more than he could bear.

He arrived at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges in the morning, and an antique omnibus — not a regular conveyance — with a driver in a blue blouse and a thin-flanked, limping steed, undertook to transport him and his luggage to Uzelles. They went very slowly, at an honest *marengote* pace; and as the sun rose higher and the leather cushions of the old vehicle became heated and gave forth a sickening odor of food and tobacco, Richard took a seat on the box, beside the driver, whom a glass of white wine, taken at the corner of the Château-Fraye road, had made very talkative. He was a former trumpeter in the 3d Chasseurs, in the days when the Duc d'Alcantara commanded the regiment. A fine old fellow, the duke, who used to beat up the women wherever he went. Not to be wondered at that he had dried up the sap. It seemed that his boy, little Charles *Six*, was having all the fun he could, too. He went off, year before last, with the wife of a farmer thereabout; at the

last fête at the Hermitage nothing else was talked about. Perhaps Monsieur le Voyageur might have heard about it.

Richard shook his head and did not speak again during the journey. After several fruitless attempts at conversation, the driver, hearing him humming between his teeth, concluded that his passenger liked music, and taking from under his box a battered bugle, covered with verdigris, he began to play all the bugle-calls of the 3d. Richard soon tired of all that blare of brass, which tortured his ears; moreover, as he approached his own home, the people whom he met on the cliff road recognized him and were surprised at his equipage. So he alighted after passing Draveil and plunged into the woods, while the omnibus went its way in the sunlight to the strains of martial music. In reality the driver's chatter had aroused his evil impulse to arrive unexpectedly, at an unusual hour and by an unusual road.

"What is she doing? Is she thinking of me?"

That was the refrain to which he walked swiftly and noiselessly over the springy moss of a narrow path leading to the Chêne-Prieur. The noonday Angelus was ringing at the Little Parish Church, whose bell he recognized in the quivering heat of the plain. He was listening to the familiar note when he heard a crackling of branches near at hand, as if some one were hurriedly running away; at the same time there was a sound as of a tool thrown to the ground, and he saw a spade lying on one of the great anthills where eggs were gath-

ered to feed the pheasants. Some marauder whom he had disturbed.

Thinking no more about it, he walked on, involuntarily quickening his pace as he approached his goal, and soon found himself at the *rond-point* of the Chêne-Prieur from which several paths radiated, and at the end of one of them he saw the gate of his own park. From where he stood, that gate, usually closed, seemed to him to be open, and he was surprised to see people passing to and fro. Men came running from the park and turned to the right into the forest, where he could distinguish a knot of people like a dark, moving spot in the light clearing. He walked in that direction, greatly puzzled by the ghost-like silence of the crowd. The whole countryside was there, Soisy, Draveil, keepers, gendarmes. What in heaven's name was going on? Something lugubrious surely, for, just as he reached the spot, Foucart's heavy van came jolting along in the ruts made by the charcoal carts.

"Here is Monsieur Richard," some one said. The crowd at once made way respectfully, disclosing Jean Delcrous the magistrate, his clerk, and the physicians from Soisy and Draveil standing in a circle apart and talking in low tones with M. Alexandre, beside a lifeless form stretched out on the grass, of which only the legs in their long gaiters could be seen, the rest of the body being sheltered and hidden by a large yellow parasol.

"Ah! my dear Fénigan, this is horrible!" murmured the magistrate in his cold, official tone, as he gave his hand to Richard without the slightest

indication of surprise at seeing him there. The other persons in the group greeted him with a terror-stricken air, but no one enlightened him as to the accident.

"Who is it?" he asked, as a suspicion suddenly flashed through his mind, driving the color from his lips and making his eyes gleam. Delcrous stared at him in amazement.

"What! you don't know? — Why, it's the Prince d'Olmütz; he has been dead, as we suppose, two or three days, and we have just been putting him back on the spot where Alexandre found him this morning, and in the same position."

At the magistrate's request, the clerk read to Richard in an undertone the narrative that he was then writing at the dictation of the former steward.

The prince left Grosbourg Friday evening after his dinner, and was not seen again until this Monday morning; but no one at the Château was troubled, especially the first two days, as he was accustomed to indulge in freaks of that sort. They were not alarmed until Sunday evening when the prince failed to appear at dinner, it being the nineteenth anniversary of his birth, to which the whole neighborhood had been invited. However, in order not to frighten the duchess, the salon was kept lighted very late and the young people danced a minuet they had learned for the occasion. Early on Monday morning, the general, who had not closed his eyes during the night, sent for M. Alexandre and informed him of his secret anxiety. M. Alexandre smiled at his first words.

"Why, my general, I saw M. Charlexis yesterday, I saw him day before yesterday."

"Where in God's name?" demanded the father joyfully.

"In the forest and always in the same place. In a corner of little Sénart near the Chêne-Prieur, where for a month past the prince has lain among the ferns every afternoon, under a big umbrella, waiting for — whom? — I have never had the curiosity to ask, but if my general wishes to know — "

"Not in the least. I am surprised simply that, as the field of his manœuvres is so near, he does n't return to Grosbourg to ease his mother's mind. If you see him to-day, I authorize you to intrude upon the secrecy of the assignation, and make that suggestion to him from me."

M. Alexandre promised to do so, and as he was returning to Uzelles, it occurred to him, instead of waiting until afternoon, to go around through the forest, skirting the parks. When he reached the Fénigans' gate an inexplicable impulse moved him to stoop and look away under the trees in the direction of the spot where the prince was usually to be found. Strangely enough, although it was barely eight o'clock in the morning, the umbrella was there, wide open, in the dew-laden grass, which is very high and thick in that neighborhood. The lover himself was there, asleep doubtless, for M. Alexandre called twice but obtained no reply. Thereupon — "

At that point the deposition stopped, and the clerk turned to Alexandre, who continued: "There-

upon, messieurs, I lifted the umbrella and saw something so frightful that I ran away, shrieking. Monsieur Richard's gardeners heard me, people came from all sides, but until the authorities arrived from Corbeil, I allowed no one to approach the body or to touch or disturb anything."

There was a murmur of approbation.

"Was he certainly dead?" queried Fénigan, a prey to an indescribable emotion in which there was even more relief than terror. The magistrate and his clerk exchanged a death-like smile.

"Not the shadow of a doubt — look for yourself," said Delcrous, pointing to what had been the Prince d'Olmütz, the captor of hearts, the irresistible young man with the *cavata*, transformed into that hideous unnamable mass, a skull imperfectly cleaned, already skeletonized in spots, with fragments of bone picked clean, as white and highly polished as ivory, and jagged bits of flesh like bloody lace-work. In the ghastly cavities of the eyes and mouth, in the nostrils and the ears, and around the jaw, twisted by a last effort of the muscles, ants and maggots and worms swarmed in countless numbers. And that was what so many women had loved and caressed, what had made men mad with jealousy!

The curious crowd, which, in defiance of the handful of gendarmes, had followed Richard toward the body, recoiled in horror and dismay. Those who had seen told the others, with compassionate exclamations, homely images: "the head has holes in it like a lantern." And as always, even

in presence of the most horrible dramas, there was some stifled laughter. Suddenly silence was restored, the emotional silence of crowds, enveloped in this instance by the buzzing of the gnats in the light, by the rustling and swarming of all the vermin in the grass. At a sign from the magistrate, the dead-wagon came forward, brushing aside the low branches, and two gamekeepers laid the body upon it, one of them having the delicacy to cover the head with a handkerchief. In taking only those few steps the bearers' blue jackets were all soiled with vermin and blood.

"Where are you going to have him taken?" Richard Fénigan asked Delcrous under his breath, forcing his voice to assume a sorrowful tone.

"To Grosbourg, by the towpath, to avoid giving the parents too severe a shock. Alexandre has undertaken to tell them. The d'Alcantaras have a family tomb on the estate, and the burial will take place at once. As for a judicial autopsy, I fancy that the two Æsculapiuses walking behind us are hardly capable of performing it alone. That mangled head disconcerts them. They incline to believe in a sudden death from congestion, a frequent occurrence in the family, which, they assume, came upon the young prince under his parasol. I am of their opinion; otherwise we must suppose a murder and the removal of the body to its usual posture under its usual shelter, which would be a refinement of ferocity; and for what object?"

As they conversed, they followed the wagon

with its sad burden escorted by M. Alexandre and the gendarmes, along the narrow stony road lined with bramble-bushes, which skirts the Fénigan park. The crowd slowly divided into gossiping groups and was scattering among the paths through the woods, when Richard's voice, suddenly rising above the sound of footsteps and the creaking of the wheels, shouted fiercely to the wagoner, who had taken his horse by the rein as if to turn and enter the park:

"Here! where are you going?"

Upon the man's reply that by passing through his estate they would gain a good half hour,— that M. Alexandre had said so, Richard uttered an angry exclamation:

"Not on your life! I absolutely forbid it. Why does that vile blackguard interfere?"

Delcrous started at the nervous excitement of the voice and gesture, which at once suggested to him a multitude of thoughts, almost suspicions; but he instantly discarded them on the simple reflection: "Oh! yes, his wife's former lover; but it 's a long while since that came to an end, and the husband and wife were reconciled. And then, examining magistrates see assassins everywhere. As this is the first affair I have had to deal with, let us see if I cannot avoid that absurdity." They arrived at the gate; he turned to give some instructions to his clerk, saluted the physicians, and, passing his arm familiarly through Richard's, led him into the park: "Now, let us go and find your ladies. I promised them this

morning that I would come and tell them what I could as soon as my task was done. — They told me, by the way, that they did n't expect you until to-morrow."

"True, but the idea of arriving a day earlier, and coming through the woods to surprise them, amused me. But I have had the surprise myself, and a most horrible one."

His tone was sincere, as was the distressed expression upon that honest, healthy face, burned by the sirocco. The magistrate was angry with himself for the suspicion that had grazed him, and he was almost on the point of accusing himself aloud and apologizing, in the state of effusive delight in which he then was. "Certainly, my dear Richard, it is a terrible accident, but, — must I admit it? — I am so happy in another direction that it is very hard for me to — You have known of my plans concerning your cousin Élise? She has just sent a favorable reply, it seems, to Madame your mother, who could only say a few words to me just now in the confusion that reigned in the house. Ah! there are the ladies."

Mme. Fénigan and Lydie had just appeared at the end of the path. It happened that they were both in the garden gathering roses early that morning, when the gardener's wife came to them in a state of intense excitement to tell them of Alexandre's ghastly find on the grass. The little scissors in Lydie's hand had pursued their task — Mme. Fénigan noticed it particularly — without the slightest interruption, without even

a quiver. She simply reflected, half aloud: "How fortunate that Richard has not returned!" following the thought with another, which she did not express: "After his threats to kill the prince, he would inevitably have been accused — I myself might have believed —" That idea haunted her; and when Delcrous, summoned from Corbeil, stopped for a moment at the Château, and she heard him discussing with his clerk the probability of its being an accident, she was on the point of congratulating herself aloud on her husband's absence; but a mysterious instinct withheld her. Under these circumstances, the young wife's alarm can be imagined when, about noon, she saw Richard's trunk and valise in front of the Pavilion.

"They came by omnibus from Villeneuve," said the gardener's wife. "Monsieur Richard took the cross-road through the forest."

Lydie felt as if she were dying as the conviction swept over her: "It was he who killed Charley." She imagined the whole sudden, terrible drama. Her husband arriving a day earlier, in order to surprise her; the prince lying in wait near the gate; the meeting of the two men; a fit of rage and the murder. Certain details remained inexplicable; but that fact did not deter her, engrossed as she was by terror and admiration; for she admired him for having dared to do it, — that timid, feeble creature, that man-child whom she believed to be capable of naught but tears and lamentations. How passionately in love he must be, and how

jealous! And amid her agony she was conscious of a wave of affection, of gratitude, a fever of blissful love, which increased in intensity when Richard appeared at a corner of the path, bronzed by the African sun, thinner than of yore, his eyes gleaming with joy, and in his whole being a something manly and determined, which she did not recognize.

Leaning on Lydie's arm, and retarding her usual rapid gait, the mother cried out to her son from afar, throwing the words before her in her impatience: "What an idea, not to let us know! We were really very much frightened when we saw your traps, and nobody with them, — especially after this horrible story."

"True, my poor darlings, I chose my day very badly."

He interrupted himself to throw his arms around his mother's neck, and in the same instant to press Lydie to his heart, being obliged to look for her face under a great pink hood. He felt that she was cold and trembling, and remarked upon it aloud. She did not reply, and Mme. Fénigan, realizing that they wished to be alone, walked ahead with Delcrous.

Richard, drunk with joy, hugged his wife's arm as the poor man hugs his bread, as the drowning man clings to his plank; he stopped at every step to look at her, to question the lowest depths of her eyes. — "Why do you tremble so? why are your hands and lips cold? My unexpected return may well have startled you, but that is all over

now. Isn't it rather the horror, the shock of this death?"

"Oh! no," she replied, in a tone of such sincerity that it could not be mistaken.

But he insisted: "Come, you must tell me; I can listen to anything now."

"He has been dead to me a long while, as you know. No, Richard, it isn't that."

"What is it, then? Aren't you happy to see me? And yet your letters have been so affectionate!"

"I am more affectionate than they, my Richard, and very happy to be with you. Oh! very, very, — I swear."

Shuddering more and more, she pressed close to him, with a concentration of her whole being, her lips mute, but trembling with a revelation or a question she dared not utter. And Richard formed all sorts of conjectures while talking of the indifferent things which are the first bond between hearts that have long been separated. At times his eyes flashed with a stormy light, little in keeping with the commonplace character of their conversation. Sinister suspicions, which he tried in vain to banish, haunted him as well, and ere long he was watching his wife with the horrified, fearful expression with which her eyes sought his.

Delcrous, the magistrate, walking in front with Mme. Fénigan, was delirious with joy on learning that Élise was ready to consent. He fancied himself on the eve of being married, thought

about giving away his cats and his parrot, the whole of his bachelor's family, and consulted Richard's mother as to his future abode and the choice of witnesses. — "Except for the distressing occurrence of this morning, I might have asked my illustrious friend, the Duc d'Alcantara."

Mme. Fénigan's contracted eyebrows warned him not to continue.

"You forget, Monsieur, that between Grosbourg and Uzelles there can be nothing in common. God knows that I wish them no ill after the blow that has come upon them, but we have been so unhappy through those people."

"Forgive my awkwardness, Madame," said Delcrous, with great earnestness; "it is due to my overflowing happiness."

The stern eyebrows remained wrinkled. That word, "happiness," seemed to them untimely, in such close proximity to that other mother across the river, whose son they were bringing home to her on the unwieldy dead-wagon. Luckily, their conversation was interrupted by the announcement that the examining magistrate was wanted at Grosbourg. Alexandre had come in the tilbury to fetch him, and was waiting on the road. Lydie's emotion increased visibly at that news; and while the magistrate was making his excuses to his hosts, Richard wondered if she were not going to faint in his arms.

Delcrous had no sooner taken his seat beside Alexandre, than his mind was filled once more

with the interest and mystery of the drama which it was his duty to unravel, and he inquired as to the condition of affairs at the Château.

"I believe that Madame la Duchesse suspects nothing, as yet," replied the old servant in a tone of reserve. "As for the general, he received this fresh misfortune with great courage; he ordered us to place the body in a small building called the Phantom, which we can reach without passing the house."

"And what do people say in the neighborhood? What do they think? Does the doctor's opinion agree with public opinion?"

The ex-steward made a vague gesture: "As to what people in the neighborhood *say*, Monsieur le Juge, I suppose, strictly speaking, it might be possible to find out. But what they *think*, that 's another matter."

"How about yourself, Monsieur Alexandre?"

"Oh! I —"

To avoid pronouncing an opinion, he made a pretence of having to restrain an inclination to shy on the part of his horse. — They reached the poplars by the bridge. Shrill voices ascended from the laundry-boat, while the clean linen flapped in the wind, on lines stretched in the field. "If your clerk had been able to take down what has been said here since this morning," continued the old beau, drawing himself up to his full height, in order to be seen at as great a distance as possible in company with the examining magistrate in the d'Alcantara carriage,

"you would know, perhaps, what people say about the affair; otherwise—"

From the way in which those thin lips set themselves firmly together, the magistrate understood that he could extract nothing from that sly compound of servant and peasant, although his little eyes seemed fully informed; he made no further effort, being fully convinced that in his office, at Corbeil, this same Alexandre would chatter without restraint, at the first summons of the law, that nightmare of country people.

Alighting on the deserted pier at one of the smaller gates of the Grosbourg estate, Delcrous found himself on the terrace over the river, where the duchess, in her hat and gloves, ready to go out, was engaged in a warm discussion with her husband and Master Jean, both of whom were sitting on the bench under the privet bushes by the tennis-court. The general's tall figure straightened up when he saw him, and he shouted to him in the distance, while the professor's eyes indulged in a frantic pantomime behind their spectacles: "Come to my assistance, my dear fellow — help us to reassure our dear duchess, who believes that we are concealing something from her."

"You are still without news, General?" Delcrous replied, in an appropriate tone.

"Still; and that is why I asked you to come, for I am beginning to be a little uneasy, I confess."

"The fact is—" the magistrate began, caressing his whiskers with an embarrassed gesture. The

"'He is there, you know,' he said, pointing with his cane to the little brick buildings."

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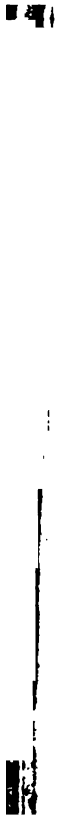

duchess, who was excitedly digging up the gravel with the ferrule of her umbrella, embraced the three men in a suspicious glance. Her cheeks were of a leaden hue, her yellow complexion had turned almost black; she had become an old woman in two days. She felt that they were united against her in the same falsehood, fully determined to tell her nothing of what she dared not guess, and addressing herself to the professor as the most timid of the three: "The key to the Phantom, you understand, Master Jean, — I must have it."

"Certainly, Madame la Duchesse; but I don't know where it is," stammered the poor devil. "The prince himself locked it — the tennis-balls used to roll in there and get lost — he must have kept the key in his pocket."

"You will look again; I tell you once more that I must have it to-morrow."

While she walked away the general said, in a loud voice, so that she might hear: "Oh! these women's imaginations! The duchess actually dreamed, last night, that they found her son drowned in the old music pavilion called the Phantom — I don't know why — where there never was a drop of water!" He motioned to Delcrous to come nearer, and, pointing with his cane to the little brick building half hidden by the shrubbery, "He is there, you know," he said, "and the autopsy must be made at night. I wish him to be buried at once; his mother would go mad if she saw him like that. — Ah! my dear Delcrous,

I have witnessed some horrible slaughter in my soldier's life; but when I saw what they brought back to me of my boy, of that pretty, fair-haired boy, — brought back to this very spot where he was playing not a week ago — "

He paused before the radiant vision of Charley, still so vivid to all that they imagined that they heard his laughter, his shouts on the lawn — "Play!" — amid the buzzing of the bees around the privets. — After a long silence the magistrate spoke first, still in an undertone: "Very well, General. The doctors will be here before night; but unless their opinions change, I think that they will declare an autopsy to be unnecessary, believing, as I do, that the prince was stricken by apoplexy."

"I am of an absolutely contrary opinion," said the Duc d'Alcantara, without moving a muscle of his pale face. "But before everything else, I wish to ask you one question. How does it happen that the preliminary steps in this horrible affair are in your hands?"

Delcrous was slightly disturbed: "For the very good reason, Monsieur le Duc, that our examining magistrate is on leave of absence for his health, that the prosecuting attorney is taking his wedding-journey — "

"And are not you thinking of preparing for yours?"

"My wedding-journey!" exclaimed the magistrate, surprised to find that his plans were already known in such high places.

"Is n't there some talk of your marrying a cousin of the Fénigans, — a *divorcée*, a comely young woman, with a comely fortune?"

From the bench on which they were sitting they could see, on the hillside opposite, the pavilion of Uzelles, and the long hedgerow leading to the Château. Wary and reserved as he was, the magistrate dared not deny his hopes in face of those stones and those trees which had been his confidants and his witnesses; he admitted that, while the details were still to be arranged, the marriage itself seemed to be decided upon.

"In that case, my dear sir" — the general's voice, as well as his dull eyes, assumed an intensely penetrating and vibrating tone and expression — "it is absolutely necessary that you should turn over the investigation of the affair to one of your colleagues, because my son has been murdered, and the murderer is no other than your future connection, Richard Fénigan."

Delcrous sprang to his feet with an outburst of indignation that seemed almost natural: "What 's that you say, Monsieur le Duc?"

"Nothing that I cannot prove. Master Jean, be kind enough, pray, to allow Monsieur to read."

The professor's terrified, trembling fingers took from a morocco satchel that lay on his knees, and placed before Delcrous' eyes, those poor delirious letters wherein Richard, in a frenzy of rage because he found nobody to face him, repeated in every key and with all the variations: "He will not fight; very well! then I will kill him! I will kill

him!" At a sign from the general, Master Jean added, in his feeble voice, which could hardly be heard: "And he did not content himself with writing these threats. Twice Monsieur Fénigan, when speaking with myself, repeated them, and swore that he would wait for the prince at some crossroad in the woods and pound his pretty face to a jelly with his boot heel, as he had done with his locket."

"What do you think about it, my dear fellow?" inquired the general.

"I confess," Delcrous replied, "that my suspicions turned in that direction at first. But there are evident impossibilities. The husband's return, very sudden it is true, only occurred this morning, and the crime is several days old. Otherwise, the vermin of the forest —"

He dared not complete his sentence before the father, who continued, with the greatest tranquillity: "The assassin may not have dealt the blow himself, but his threats against the pretty face which stood in his way have been too fully carried out in the direction indicated by his jealous rage for him not to have had a hand in it. I tell you, Delcrous, that although I do not know how the horrible thing was done, I recognize the imprint of passion, — its claws. It was Richard, I tell you; it was he. And if you let him slip through your fingers, if you don't have him taken into custody, and quickly, you will be accused of dealing gently with your relations, and it may cost you dear."

Delcrous started: "Oh! Monsieur le Duc —"

"It 's a very simple matter. Telegraph to Versailles for a substitute."

The magistrate meditated a few seconds, weighing his chances; then said, with an emphatic gesture:

"General, this is a case of conscience; I ask you to give me until to-night to make up my mind."

XVII.

WHILE this melancholy discussion was in progress under the trees at Grosbourg, on the other side of the river, on the unwooded slopes where the Fénigans' orchard displayed its espaliers, buzzing with wasps, its arched trellises, its paths lined with fruit trees, stunted and slender like Chinese trees, Richard was walking with his mother; and it was touching to see the anxious way in which she held her umbrella over the sturdy buccaneer who was walking by her side, and talking with her, for all the world as if he were a little child. Lydie had remained in the salon to receive visitors; for Monday was Mmes. Fénigans' reception-day, and the drama of the morning largely increased their list of callers, curious to learn the details of the affair, — curious, above all, to observe the young wife's face and manner in presence of the catastrophe.

Despite her perturbed state of mind, despite the desire to be with her husband, Lydie realized that Richard's safety and the family dignity required that she should defy the malevolent intrusion of all these people. What would that trifling sacrifice of self-esteem amount to compared with what he had dared to do for her sake? And

while the bell at the Château gate rang almost without cessation, the mother, recognizing her visitors from the further end of the orchard, named them to her son as they arrived: "There 's the Château-Fraye break; there are the little Jewesses from Mérogis. Your wife did well to receive them, my dear child. If she had denied herself to visitors to-day, God knows what all these people would have said and thought."

"What could they have thought?" Richard asked himself under his breath. In order to be quite alone, they had taken refuge in the last path, between beds of violets and the many-hued dame-wort with its odor of powder and incense.

"No one knows," she replied. — "That the prince's death touches Lydie deeply, that she keeps out of sight so that her grief may not be seen. The world is so unkind!"

Richard drew a deep breath of relief, as if he were expecting her to suggest some more terrible suspicion. The mother continued: "Painful and premature as that death was, no one who knows our darling's proud nature can believe that it has caused her to shed a single tear. In the first place, she never loved this Charlexis — and his dastardliness and cruelty finally aroused a feeling of hatred, a longing for revenge. I remember that in her delirium, at Quiberon, she even went so far as to threaten to kill him."

"Hush — hush!" muttered her son earnestly, as one of the gardener's assistants passed, carrying sashes of window-glass; and when the boy was

out of hearing, "Did you know," he asked his mother, with some embarrassment, "that the — the other — did you know that he had been prowling about here for some time?"

"I learned it this morning; your wife knew nothing about it, — at least, she told me so, and I never doubt her word; I know her too well, now."

Richard stopped in the middle of the path, deeply moved: "Since you know her, perhaps you can tell me the meaning of her confusion, her constraint in my presence, ever since my arrival? I feel that some confession is weighing on her mind which she dares not make to me. I thought, for a moment, that that spectacle in the underbrush, that hideous thing, swarming with vermin —"

"But she saw nothing."

"I know she did not, so I am trying to find some other explanation. Oh! don't be afraid, my black butterflies are not pursuing me now — I am cured, and forever. But this Charlexis, whose nature was double and complex, like his name, had an infernal mind, and I am wondering whether, enraged to see that Lydie had escaped him, he did not try to lure her back by some villainy. Suppose he has kept some of her letters, a portrait that she would n't wish shown, and that in my absence he used them as a bait, as a threat to obtain a meeting with her first of all."

"Ah! *mon Dieu!* that is true; you remind me —" Mme. Fénigan was interrupted by two violent peals of the bell in the inner courtyard.

"Lydie is sending for me, I am sure. The salon must be crowded." — She understood her son's gesture. — "But first let me finish my story. Last Friday, Corbeil market-day, I took Lydie to Corbeil, for she had not been out since you went away."

The mother proceeded cautiously with the story of the meeting with the young prince at the jeweller's, dwelt strongly on the young woman's pallor on leaving the shop, the shock to her nerves, which proved that the meeting was unexpected; and, still fearing some explosion from the poor jealous husband, she added: "If Lydie did not mention the incident in her letters, it was because I implored her not to. You understand, my son. You must n't be angry with her for it — I am to blame, I alone."

But Richard did not for one moment doubt his mother's veracity or his wife's purity. He simply remembered the horrible scene, so different from this one, which that same orchard witnessed only a few months before. How many things had happened since then, what a metamorphosis in all their feelings! He gravely took the dear motherly hands, gloved for the garden, and pressed them fervently to his lips: "Have no fear, dearest mother. Henceforth I have as perfect faith in Lydie as in yourself — but what you tell me confirms all my apprehensions. Now I know, I understand —"

"What? What is it? What do you imagine? Really, you frighten me."

Another peal at the bell, and almost immediately a servant came in search of Mme. Fénigan. It was as she thought: her presence in the salon had become indispensable. And in a tone of assumed cheerfulness, for the anxiety of her children was beginning to infect her as well, she said to Richard, as she went away: "I will send your wife to you; try to confess her."

For a long time Richard stood, pensive and motionless, resting his arms on the low wall, crested with brick, which separated the orchard from a large field of oats that sloped down to the Seine. Confess Lydie, — what was the use? His mind was made up. Between her and her former lover some bond existed, — some rankling, degrading bond. That would explain his prowling about the park and the meeting at Corbeil. Caught as in a trap, between that villain's audacity and her husband's impending return, she had gone bravely to a last meeting, to gain possession, at any price, of the pledge — letter or portrait — that was still in blackguardly hands. And there, being confronted by conditions too infamous for acceptance, the poor girl had defended, avenged herself, as on that other evening, at Quiberon, but with a surer weapon, and not turned against herself this time. The man lying dead before her, her indignation had subsided, and left her stupefied, horror-stricken by her crime, with the longing, so natural and human, of confessing it, especially to her husband, who alone was able to understand her and make excuses for her. That

was why she clung so to him, with her eyes in his, as if to say to him: "I am afraid, I am ashamed — hide me, save me!"

What was he to do? How receive that terrible confession otherwise than by throwing wide open his heart and his arms? Was not he, too, responsible? Had he not said to her many, many times, and in such a desperate tone: "So long as that man lives, we cannot be happy — I shall always remember that he has had you; I shall always fear that he still possesses you!" Could he reprove his wife for having rid them both of him at last? And if, at that very moment, he felt his heart expand, uplifted by an incomprehensible sense of lightness, if those tremulous waves of wheat and riotous oats, that bend in the river gleaming bright beyond the broad fields, and that sky and those trees — if all that familiar landscape dazzled him as never before, did he not owe it to the feeling that he was alone in the desire to possess that adorable creature?

Hasty, furtive steps, the rustling of a muslin gown. She is beside him, panting for breath, and so pale.

"Delcrous is there," she whispers to Richard, without looking at him, but resting her elbows on the low wall by his side. "Everything has changed, it seems, and they believe now that it was a crime — they are on a new scent." — Oh! those poor white lips, forcing themselves to smile as they speak — if they had been alone in the garden, how quickly he would have brought back

color and life to them! — but they heard rakes grating in all the paths, watering-pots rattling on the stone basins.

"What is the scent? Do you know?" queried Richard, in an indifferent tone, seeking to reassure her.

"No; the judge will say nothing. I left the whole salon crowding curiously about him."

"What does it matter to us, after all?" said Richard, with affectionate earnestness. He seized a round, youthful arm under the light muslin, and pressed it against his. "We are so happy here!"

Around them, as the sun sank lower, the gilliflowers, yellow, mauve and purple, exhaled their incense; the carnations poured forth their fragrance with frantic zeal, and amid that confusion of odors and brilliant colors, clouds of microscopic butterflies sought the cool emanations from the watered plants, fluttered about the flowers like blue sparks. "Oh! yes, happy, indeed!" sighed Lydie, resting her head on her husband's shoulder with childish coquetry, but with an agony of terror in her heart. Surprised to find him so calm in the face of all that threatened their well-being, she asked herself: "What does he hope for? Where does he get his courage? If we were only sure of not having to part, of suffering and expiating his act together. — Ah! my poor dear love!" — Richard, for his part, relieved by Charlexis' death from the weight that had so long oppressed his heart, gazed in ecstasy upon his wife's radiant beauty, as he had gazed upon

the splendor of the sky and the landscape; but the anguish in the lovely gray eyes that rested upon his disturbed him, distressed him beyond measure. "Oh! do not sigh like that any more. Tell me, Lydie, what is the matter? While we are entirely by ourselves, all alone, heart to heart —"

"Not alone enough, my Richard, not close enough for what we have to say to each other."

"Where, then? When shall it be? This evening, to-night?"

"Yes, to-night — we will tell each other everything."

Their breaths, their hands, sought one another, burning with emotion. And Richard whispered low: "Are n't you afraid that I will behave badly, as I did the other time, the night I went away, you remember?"

"I am not afraid of that now," she said confidently.

"Why not?"

She drew herself up, as if released by a spring: "Because, now, there is one thing between us."

He pretended not to understand, and asked, in a low voice: "What thing?"

They looked at each other, trembling, as if attacked by the same fever, aflame with the same passion. She had behind her the sky all ablaze, forming a halo around her lovely hair; his eyes were deluged by the red sun as it sank to rest. Never had each of them seemed so beautiful to the other, never had they longed for each other

so passionately. But it was not that glorifying light that transfigured them, that caused them to appear to each other in new and superb guise. It was the *thing*, the sinister *thing* of which each of them suspected the other, and which, more potent than pity and forgiveness, alone had the power to restore life to their caresses, and to make them forget everything.

"Fénigan! I say, Fénigan!"

The imperious, incisive voice came from the other end of the orchard. "It is Delcrous," said the young wife, with a terrified start.

"What is he thinking of to follow us here!" grumbled Richard, between his teeth. At the same time he enveloped Lydie with an instinctive, protecting gesture, which seemed to say: "I am here; fear nothing."

Seeing him so tranquil, she thought: "How brave he is! how I love him!" And Richard thought her very affecting, too, she was so sensitive, so womanly, with the nervous tremors that agitate a true woman after a hasty act.

"Excuse me, my dear Fénigan," said Delcrous, walking toward them, with short, rapid steps, "I am anxious to be at Corbeil before my clerk leaves; could you send me over?"

"Nothing easier," replied Fénigan.

"I will go and tell Libert to put in the horses," cried Lydie, leaping for joy. Delcrous was going; nothing to fear to-day.

"Let us all go and tell Libert," said her husband, laughingly.

As they crossed the garden, traversed diagonally by long golden rays, while the swallows flew in circles over their heads, the magistrate, who was walking beside Fénigan, whispered in his ear: "Just drive over with me yourself: only us two; I have some questions to ask you." Evidently he wanted to question him about Lydie; that was the scent he had brought from Grosbourg. Richard had to summon his whole reserve stock of self-possession, of firmness.

"Agreed," he replied, in the same mysterious tone.

When Lydie saw the open *calèche* drive into the courtyard, where the carriages of the visitors were waiting around the paulownia, and Richard take his seat beside the examining magistrate, her lovely face changed color, as a secret instinct suddenly warned her that they were taking her husband away from her, that she should not see him again at once. However, she mastered her emotion, and said, with a smile, "Be polite, messieurs, and take me. I only need time to put on a hat."

Richard understood the significant pressure of the magistrate's arm: "It is n't worth while; I am only going as far as the open country." He leaned over, and threw her a kiss with the tips of his fingers. "Go back to the salon for a while," he added; "you will do mamma a favor."

A buzzing of women's voices came through the open windows on the ground floor, — a very earnest, worldly palaver. Standing at the top of

the steps before going in, Lydie saw the horses attached to the *calèche* prance through the gateway, and her husband turn and call to her: "I will come back soon."

It was not without a tearing of the heartstrings — although in speaking of him the image may seem somewhat extravagant — that Delcrous had sacrificed Uzelles to Grosbourg, love to promotion. He had walked from the Château along the Seine; and when he was half across the bridge his perplexity was not at an end; if Little Red-Riding-Hood had been there, doubtless the magic of her laughter, the power of her presence in the flesh would have triumphed over his wish for rapid promotion and for the prestige due to influence in high places. But, abandoned to his own instincts alone, the magistrate was incapable of passing the gates of Uzelles until he had determined upon the course which his ambition and his lack of passion advised him to adopt. He would do "his duty as a magistrate," and to that end would, first of all, obtain a private interview with his dear Fénigan before the regular preliminary examination, so that he could confirm the admissions of the suspect by the confidential communications of the friend. And so, as soon as they were in the open country, and the hard-trodden bed of the high road rang beneath the horses' feet, the judge began his inquiry.

His friend Fénigan must understand his reason for objecting to his bringing his young wife; for how could they discuss before her the death of the

Prince d'Olmütz, which was, clearly, a violent and tragic death, and not a simple accident, as the physicians declared?

"So you have proofs?" asked Richard, eagerly.

"Absolute proofs," Delcrous replied, with a nod.

The husband no longer had any doubt. It was certainly Lydie who was suspected. But what folly to suppose that he would betray his wife to these limbs of the law, that he would not prefer, a hundred times over, to accuse himself! Delcrous, although he was far from shrewd, had felt him quiver under his tan, and he continued, delighted with his success: "This is the first bit of evidence, and one that escaped us at first. Like most men of amorous prowess, young men especially, the prince carried on his person letters from women, portraits, mementoes, which he showed freely. A little tortoise-shell card-case, full of offerings of this description, and well known to his friends, never left him. Now, when he was found, his pockets were empty; that is the fact that guided and confirmed our suspicions."

Precisely the drama Richard had imagined; Lydie determined to recover, at any price, some memento that Charley refused to return. However, he contained himself, and mustered strength to suggest an objection to the magistrate, whose arguments nipped him like pincers: "But if the pockets were so thoroughly emptied as that, he was killed for purposes of robbery, nothing more."

"No, for he still had his purse, his watch, and his rings. Whoever did it had no designs on aught save his letters and his pretty lady-killer's face. It is the typical crime inspired by passion."

The husband did not reply. Delcreus feared that he had gone too far, and that he might be unable to obtain anything more; he tried a digression, in order to trap him again. "Do you know what has occurred to me, Richard? — that it was an act of revenge, committed by a woman." He saw that Richard started, so concluded that the bait was what he needed. "The thought came to me when I saw that the body was carefully stretched out in the grass, in a customary attitude, and under its usual shelter, giving the illusion of life. Does n't it strike you that that setting up of a Musée Grévin indicates a vendetta-like refinement and coquetry altogether feminine?"

Richard realized that his wife was lost, and threw himself in front of her. — "Vengeance has no sex, my dear fellow, any more than jealousy. A betrayed husband, in quest of revenge, may stage his crime as subtly as the wickedest woman."

"Then you do not see a woman's hand in this affair."

"I would swear to the contrary."

"*Dame*, you 're an expert," said the magistrate, shaking his sides with a hearty chuckle, which he considered clever. Then, abruptly, with one of those changes of base which form a part of the

strategy of the preliminary examination, he asked, in a serious, confidential tone: "You are, so I am told, of a very jealous temperament?"

"Very jealous, in truth."

"It seems, indeed, that under the influence of that passion you wrote some letters of a violent nature."

"As if a man knows what he does when he is in such a frenzy of rage!"

That episode represented one of those swelling blasts upon the organ, followed by a few measures of silence, during which the minds of the listeners become calm and recover their self-possession. On the road, which grew whiter as the sky darkened, workmen passed by twos and threes, spade and wallet over their shoulders, returning home weary and silent, with all the weight of the day's toil upon their loins. A wagoner, lulled to sleep by the tinkling of the bells, leaped hurriedly from his seat to make room for the *calèche*, which the vagabond — sitting on the edge of a ditch, occupied in unwinding the bands of cotton from his bleeding feet — looked after with an envious eye. At the foot of the sloping vineyards, the Seine, empurpled by the setting sun, made the dark masses of the forest along the cliff road seem darker than before. At intervals the towing-chain whistled over the river, and the forest above answered, through its nightingales, with a shower of joyous, amorous notes, blended with the odor of lilies of the valley, which floated through the carriage as it

passed, and evoked for Richard the adorable image of Lydie, for Delcrous Élise's merry laugh and gleaming teeth. O music of May, O fragrant shadows of the forest verge, with what mysterious fluids dost thou envelop the most froward hearts! The magistrate, deeply impressed, was almost ready to telegraph to Versailles for a substitute to take his place in the preliminary examination; but that weakness did not last.

Suddenly, as they were about entering Soisy, a tall figure emerged from a narrow road leading up from the river through the vineyards, — a figure outlined in black against the chalky whiteness of the road. — "Good-afternoon, Monsieur Cérès," cried Richard, calling to the coachman to stop. The vicar's first words were an inquiry whether the owner of the Little Parish Church had also returned. Richard replied that he had left M. Mérivet at Marseille, but not for long. — "But what keeps you abroad so late, my dear abbé? Is there suffering to be relieved in this neighborhood?" — The old priest wiped the perspiration from the crown of white hair beneath his broad-brimmed hat, and said, very simply, "I have just come from your fishing grounds, Monsieur. Père Georges, the old beggar to whom you gave shelter there, sent for me."

"Is he still sick?"

"Oh! he is dying. I shall administer extreme unction to him this evening."

"Poor Père Georges! Lydie will be very sorry. — Charge all the expenses of the burial to

me, I beg, Monsieur l'Abbé," he added, as the cassock faded away in the twilight.

"Thanks, kind heart," replied the priest's kind voice, already far away.

The shadow of the trees disappeared from the fields. Everything became black, as if darkened by the wing of death which had crossed the road. While the coachman was lighting his lanterns, Delcrous, his mind recurring to the drama and his inchoate examination, asked his dear friend Fénigan, "When did you leave Monsieur Mérivet?"

"I left him yesterday morning." He corrected himself hastily, thinking that he was endangering his wife: "But no, what am I saying? — It was day before yesterday — two days ago, that is. You can't imagine how a night's travelling upsets one's ideas of time."

"He is rivetting his fetters, poor devil!" thought the magistrate; and, impelled by a sort of pity, professional dilettantism perhaps, finding his own part too easy to play, he exerted himself to open his friend's eyes to his imprudence. "But this morning, when we met in the forest, you told me that you had just arrived. And that must be the truth, for it 's impossible that you should have been prowling about the neighborhood two days without once entering your own house."

"That is clear," muttered Richard, purposely embarrassed.

This time the judge said to himself, "He is acting like a fool!" And, after a moment's reflection, he added, aloud, "Look you, Fénigan,

between ourselves, you know that the relations between the Prince d'Olmütz and a person who is dear to you are unfortunately very well known in the neighborhood."

"I know it," rejoined Richard, impassively.

"Very well; have n't you said to yourself that, finding the prince's body almost at your gate, the authorities would think at once of an act of vengeance committed, if not by you, at least by some one in your house?"

"That idea did not occur to me because it was an altogether too simple supposition, and it was much more ingenious to suppose that the prince was killed elsewhere, and was carried to that spot with a perfectly comprehensible end in view."

Delcrous felt that he was out-generalled, and said aloud, looking Richard frankly in the face: "That is well reasoned. I desire, however, to put one more question to you, which you are at liberty not to answer. Jealous as you are known to be, I fancy you arriving home unexpectedly by the gate leading into the forest, and finding yourself face to face with the young prince, just coming out of your park at daybreak: what would have happened? Don't you think that —"

"That I would have killed him? Yes, most assuredly; and by authority of law, too."

"Not on your life, unhappy man! The law authorizes killing, I grant you — but only in case the guilty parties are caught in the act."

"My dear Delcrous, to a jealous man's imagination they are always caught in the act!"

The words were uttered with a vehemence that made the magistrate jump on the cushions of the *calèche*, and seemed to him the most convincing admission he was likely to obtain from this private, confidential interview. Now it was time for the examining magistrate to appear. The husband asked himself anxiously, "What is he going to do? What has he to say to me that he brings me here?"

They were just entering Corbeil, as the first lanterns twinkled on the Seine in the last rays of the setting sun. A little black smoke was still issuing from the gigantic chimneys of the flour-mills and paper-mills, and they met the mill-hands walking in silent groups along the side-walk, all — men and women alike — carrying on their arms dingy-looking baskets of straw as black as soot, doubtless because of the gases in the mills. Aside from those weary flocks, there was no one on Rue Notre-Dame, no one on the dark and narrow Place Galignani, in a corner of which, back to back with the great mill on the Essonne, with its roof covered with sifted flour as if with snow, stood the old Palais de Justice, communicating with the house of detention.

"The president's carriage is still here," said Delcrous, seeing that both wings of the gate were open; and as the coachman hesitated, he called to him: "Drive in, drive in!"

In the courtyard, dimly lighted by a remnant of daylight and by two venerable lanterns, he alighted first, and requested Richard to attend him to his office. "I have an important commu-

nication to make to you," he muttered, in a changed, very harsh voice. Richard, without replying, followed him to a large room at the end of the corridor, where a lamp, half turned down, stood on a roll-top desk. The silence of the place was emphasized by the muffled, rhythmical throbbing of the mill and its hydraulic machinery. Delcrous turned up the lamp and rang for his clerk, who was at work in the adjoining room. While they were scribbling and whispering together: "Order for detention, secret confinement obligatory," Richard looked out through a long, barred window into another small courtyard, where, over a yellow door, he saw these words, which he could hardly decipher in the waning light: "HOUSE OF DETENTION." Oh! the ghastly low door! and how well that huge bat, whirring about in the stifling atmosphere between four high black walls, on that sultry summer evening, symbolized the misery confined therein!

"My dear Monsieur Fénigan," — at the sound of the judge's sharp voice Richard turned toward the desk, — "I am distressed beyond measure. I am obliged to hold you at the disposal of the proper authorities."

Richard Fénigan assumed a horror-stricken expression; but he must have expected some surprise of that sort; for, as he alighted from the carriage, he had slipped into the hand of the coachman Libert, sitting like a statue on his box, this little note for Lydie: "Go away at once. Wherever you may be, I will join you within a week."

XVIII.

LEAVING Richard's carriage to continue its journey, Abbé Cérès walked through the main street of Soisy, where the crackling of green wood came from every door, together with a strong odor of onion soup, and rang at the gate of the orphanage.

"Our dear mother superior is still very ill," he was told at the door-keeper's wicket; "but if Monsieur l'Abbé wishes to see Sister Martha, she is in the first courtyard."

The Irishwoman, at whose heels a cluster of maidens of all sizes were capering and gambolling, shook her skirts clear with both hands, in order to run to meet the old priest, still out of breath from her merry romp. At the vicar's first words the great wings of the mob-cap, so dazzlingly white against the black walls of the courtyard, fluttered in joyful surprise. "Come this way, Monsieur l'Abbé; no one is better able to inform you than I." — And in the soft half-light of the parlor, perfumed by the rose-strewn altar erected for the commemoration of the month of Mary, in front of the statue of the Virgin with the long falling chaplet, Sister Martha, with one of her characteristic, abrupt gestures, reminiscent of the *Frères Ignorantins*, took from the library

shelves a long green-backed register, and said, after rapidly turning over the leaves:

"Here is the exact date of our little Lydie's admission to the orphanage, — October 28th, 1860; nearly twenty-nine years ago, the first year of my novitiate; that is why, doubtless, I remember perfectly even the most trivial detail of that adoption. It was eight o'clock, the hour for evening prayers. Marie of Bethany, our door-keeper, the same who just admitted you, came to Mlle. de Bourron with terrified gestures. She had picked up, outside her wicket, a child of eighteen months or two years, sound asleep, half naked, wrapped in a blanket, to which was pinned, like a great butterfly, a white paper with this name written in an awkward hand: 'LYDIA.'"

"That corresponds exactly," said the vicar, stooping over the huge folio. With beaming face the Irishwoman asked: "So you have found her family? I was sure of it. People of this province, are they not?"

"No, sister."

"Great nobles, surely?"

"Oh! very, very far from it."

"But I remember," persisted the nun, "that on the blanket — a great horse-blanket — a coronet was stamped, and a coat-of-arms. Our register mentions that fact also, you will see."

"A stolen blanket, I fear," said the incumbent of the Little Parish Church, with a kindly smile.

"Stolen!" cried the Irishwoman, indignantly. "Then where did the poor child come from?"

The vicar explained that he was not at liberty to disclose the mystery of Mme. Richard's birth to any but herself. He had given his promise to an aged grandfather, who, being at death's door, wished to see his little Lydie once more. "My motive in coming here first, sister, was to verify certain details, certain dates in a sadly confused story, stammered by a toothless mouth, which, though distorted by age and sickness, has told me the truth, I see." — He rose. The sister did likewise, urging him no further, approving his reserve the more fully, she said, because everybody at the Fénigans', as well as at the orphanage, shared the illusion that the young woman was nobly born.

"Far from it, *pécaïre!*" exclaimed the priest, in his rough Ariège patois.

Very late that evening he was following the bank of the Seine with Lydie, who was quite at home in those narrow grassy roads, which she had traversed so many times when she accompanied her husband to cast or draw his nets.

Wrapped in an ample light veil, she walked in front of the priest, warned him away from a rabbit hole or the ring to which a boat was made fast, for he walked hesitatingly, his hands being fully occupied with the viaticum and its appurtenances. Although the night was light, a dense mist rose from the river, confusing it with its banks, and spread in fleecy sheets half-way up the hill. As they approached the little cove where Richard's boats were moored, they saw a light through the

disjointed planks of the cabin. At the same moment a thin shadow ran out to meet them.

"Is it you, Mother Lucriot?"

"Yes, Monsieur l'Abbé, but you have come too late with the Blessed Lord. Père Georges is dead."

Fluttering about, amid the mist, with gestures like those of a marionette behind a square of oiled paper, the little shadow described the poor old man's last moments. All the evening he had muttered incomprehensible things, and watched the door with eyes like a cat's. Then, when the doctor came, he sat up in bed, and, not seeing the person he was expecting, fell back, with his mouth wide open, and breathed no more. Luckily Mother Lucriot had a bottle of holy water, and she had been keeping vigil for an hour beside the body.

"Thanks, my good woman," said the vicar. "Now, wait outside. I will call you."

He gently pushed Lydie before him, trembling like a leaf. In a damp jumble of oars, pots, nets, hooks and fishing-rods, two silver candlesticks, on a box covered with a white cloth, for the reception of the viaticum, lighted a small space around the bed of death. The hands, the arms, all of the old mendicant's body, from the neck down, was covered with the clothes heaped on the rough pallet; only the face, stood out, tranquil and glorified, no longer bloated and vinous, but as white as wax, and without a trace of grimace or wrinkle in any part. Even the beard, combed

and brushed, fell majestically over his breast, and made one fancy an aged King Lear of the high road, stricken with death while awaiting his Cordelia.

Suffocated at first by the indescribable odor exhaled by the hovels and garments of genuine destitution, the *odor of the poor*, Lydie was instantly struck by the beauty, the grandeur of that old beggar's face; and in the presence of Death the great leveller, the shame that had oppressed her all the evening, since she had known that she was that vagabond's granddaughter, gave place to a loving and respectful pity. The priest had led her thither, against her will, rebellious, frantic, ready to protest against such a degrading origin, to shriek in that old man's face: "You lie!" Now, leaning over the poor face which, perhaps, bore some resemblance to her own, her eyes were swollen with tears at the thought of that life of devotion and poverty which Abbé Cérès described to her.

The Corbeil road one autumn evening: a van passing, with its load of gypsies, basket-makers, scythe-sharpeners, fortune-tellers. Bread is scarce; the wheels creak for lack of grease. And the fine orphanage standing at the entrance to the town of Soisy, with its new roof and light curtains, suggests to those nomads the idea of leaving there one of their hungry little brats, — the youngest, the angelic little darling, whom they deposit at nightfall under the cross-surmounted porch. The mother wept the first night;

but, surrounded by so many others to be fed, she reflected that that one, at least, would be saved from suffering. A few turns of the wheels, and no one in the caravan gave another thought to the little one, — no one save the old grandfather, who remained behind alone, to beg his bread in the neighborhood of the convent of Soisy, so that he might see if the abandoned child was made welcome; and who, for thirty years, until his death, had never left that region, watching the pretty little gypsy pass, watching her grow to be a girl, a young woman, without ever once betraying the secret of her humiliating paternity.

And Lydie remembered. On Thursday, when the orphans went out to walk, the old beggar followed them at a distance, over the blazing road. — "Your pauper, Lydie!" the smaller children would cry; while the larger ones whispered: "Your lover, Lydie!" And they would all point, laughingly, to the old vagabond with the bald head, crossed by a great blue vein which swelled in the hot sun. On other days the ground was flooded, violent gusts of wind blew the autumn rain about and stretched around the horizon the vast gray net, with its close, quivering meshes, amid which the figure of Père Georges appeared, sitting on a mile-stone, raising his streaming beard and eyes toward the parlor of the orphanage; and that morning last winter, during her convalescence at the convent, when they found the poor old man buried in the snow, where he had slept all night; and that other morning, two years

before, that morning of sinister omen, despite the bright July sun, when Lydie, escaping by way of the forest gate, saw Père Georges suddenly appear across her path, barring her flight, as if he divined her mad purpose, and were trying to oppose its execution. Oh! yes, he knew that his child was escaping him, that she was perhaps lost forever; and the despairing sob which was his only adieu should have told her of the heroic and loving devotion contained within that mass of rags and tatters. Poor Père Georges! To think that, after all his suffering, the supreme joy of seeing and embracing his child once, only once, that longing of his last moments, could not have been given him! His Cordelia had come too late, and, standing beside the grandfather, who had gone to his last rest, she asked herself how, at what price, she could show her gratitude for such self-renunciation and love.

"Close his eyes, Madame; that is all that he wished you to do."

She started at the priest's words, and, stooping over the dead man's face, already as cold and hard as a stone, she kissed his forehead, and closed the lifeless lids over the glassy stare fixed on eternity. "That is all that I could give him," she murmured; then she added, addressing the vicar: "I beg you, Monsieur Cérès, not to consider me the proud and heartless woman I must inevitably appear to you, when I ask you to keep what has happened this evening a secret between ourselves — strictly between ourselves."

"I was about to propose it to you," said the priest coldly. "I understand that family considerations —"

"No, you do not know — you cannot know. The considerations to which you refer would not have prevented my acknowledging my humble birth and giving the old grandfather a funeral worthy of his courage, walking, myself, at the head of the procession. I owed him as much as that. But certain terrible, unforeseen circumstances — My husband has been arrested, Monsieur Cérès — this very evening — in connection with the Prince d'Olmütz affair. He died by violence, and Richard is charged with his death. That fact will explain the trouble we were all in at the Château, and how I was able to come out unnoticed. When you arrived, we had just heard the news; you can imagine my mother-in-law's stupefaction, her terrible distress. Her son charged with murder, — a Fénigan in prison! and through my fault, it seems — because of his wife! The unhappy mother does not accuse me, but I divine her feeling. And imagine, added to all her righteous grievances, this further grievance of my birth, — this stain which I bring to the name of the Fénigans, who have become, through me, connections of Père Georges! No, I should not have the courage to tell them, neither her nor her son. Why, even in respect to public opinion and the magistrate's judgment, if it should be known that Richard had taken his wife from a gypsy's van, from a family of wandering bohe-

mians, fortune-tellers, my husband's cause would suffer, by reason of an appearance of self-debasement and degradation, which might compromise him very seriously."

Abbé Cérès, whose energetic, mobile features made all his feelings visible, was amazed at first, then deeply moved by the young woman's frank avowal; and he took her hands with a familiar, kindly gesture.

"You are right a hundred times over, my dear child; but you need have no fear, — this is like a secret of the confessional. No one saw you come here except Mother Lucriot, for whom I will answer; at all events, you are known to be kind to the poor, and especially to this man. Your presence in the cabin, where you gave him shelter, would seem perfectly natural, since your husband himself has undertaken to pay the expenses of burial." — And as Lydie expressed surprise, he told her of his meeting with Richard and the examining magistrate on the road.

"Dear love!" she sighed, moved to tears by the thought that, even in the midst of his own drama, at the height of a discussion most vital to his own welfare, he had thought of Lydie's pauper.

"I propose that he be buried to-morrow," continued the priest, "and that he shall have a fitting, but very simple funeral. I ask you to be present with me, and also to attend mass next Sunday at the Little Parish Church, — it will be a mass for the dead; but for what dead we two alone shall know. We will not bury him in the

paupers' corner in Draveil cemetery. As I have Monsieur Richard's authority, I propose to purchase a small lot, as near as possible to the high road where this nomad always lived, and to order a large black stone, on which the dates of his birth and death will be carved, with the name which I found in this note-book."

He took from under the pillow a small, damp, dirty note-book, all impregnated with the terrible odor, and passed to the young woman what is called a certificate of identity, on which she read, among stamps of municipal offices and dirty finger-marks:

"*Georges Mendelsohn, called Père Georges Rougegoutte (Alsace), 1802.*"

That was all they had found upon him — that little book, and the key to *his cabin*, as he called it, — an enormous key, which he wore around his neck, against the skin, carefully attached to a little chain. The poor man was so old, so ill, his memory so uncertain as to everything that did not concern the *liddle one*, that the priest had been unable to obtain any exact information as to his country, his name or his family. So far as he was concerned, the universe began and ended at Lydie; the rest was like dust or mist on the high road. However, as the entry was evidently written at the time of his arrival in Soisy, before he was enfeebled by disease and age, the date 1802, and the name Mendelsohn, might well be genuine.

"An illustrious name in art, is it not, Madame?" said the vicar, doubtless to allay the smart of the wound to her pride, which he supposed to be more severe than she chose to show. She assented gently and silently, standing erect and grave, in her hand the little note-book of destitution, wherein that great name, which might well be her own, stood out in striking contrast to the soiled and rumpled page, even as her whole fashionable person contrasted with the muddy floor of the cabin and its black, tarred walls. — The long whistle of a tow-boat calling for the lock roused Lydie from her musing. The candles smoked and flickered; great shadows went and came over the dead man's leaden face, while the priest knelt beside the cot, praying. She did not feel the courage to do as much. Too many things were stirring within her; she was excited rather than genuinely moved, and was especially desirous of an opportunity to reflect, to recover her self-possession. A last glance at her pauper, whose deep slumber aroused her envy, and she was outside.

"Does Madame wish me to walk home with her?" whispered Mother Lucriot, who had been dozing behind a boat, with her head in her skirts.

"No, thanks;" and Lydie, in haste to be alone, plunged into the mist, which was more dense and darker than when she came. The lock shut out the whole horizon in one direction, with a dull, continuous rumbling as of thunder, which drowned the despairing shriek of the tow-boat. It seemed

to her that it was she, her life — in its dire distress, calling, shrieking for help. Everything was so dark, so confused in her poor mind, after that long, tempestuous day! In the morning that dead man found on the greensward, then Richard's arrest, and, while she was trying to understand the strange note that came from the prison, Abbé Cérès coming to take her to Père Georges's bedside! — And so that was all that there was beneath that coronet and coat-of-arms, those golden illusions of her childhood, in which she wrapped herself in her hours of sorrow, in which she sought refuge for her outbreaks of pride, of unconscious rebellion. Now her noble origin was established, her adventurous nomadic instincts explained. Ye melancholy wayfarers who paused to drink at the wayside fountain, ye travelling vans whose smoke she followed with her eyes until it vanished in the distance, — that is why she loved you so well! Ye were her fatherland, her ambulatory tribe. Would that she had continued to live among you! — And as she thought of Richard and his mother, of those upright, peaceful existences which her gypsy blood had disarranged and brought to shame, Lydie regretted sincerely that they had not let her die at Quiberon. For a moment, indeed, the river running close at hand, the perpendicular bank, the deep water flashing against the piles of the bridge, and swirling amid the long grass, the scanty hair of the abyss, renewed her temptation to suicide. She fancied herself climbing the hill

next morning in the dead-wagon. — But suddenly the thought of Richard, loving and devoted, of all that he had done for her, enlightened her as to her true duty. No, she was no longer at liberty to dispose of her life. Even if she had not for her husband the sweet, deep feeling that filled her heart, she owed it to herself to follow him, to be with him to the end of the desperate course upon which he had entered through love for her. And while, in her ardent, romantic little brain, projects of renunciation, of self-sacrifice in every form were taking shape, while she imagined herself exiled with him to some scorching tropical country, living in the bush with convicts, the distant whistle of the tow-boat passing through Corbeil awoke Richard Fénigan, overjoyed to find himself in the jail by the river in his wife's stead.

XIX.

On a certain bright, still morning, without a cloud, without a breath, the mowers were mowing the lawns at Grosbourg. On the long stretch of velvet turf, surrounded by a white marble baluster and adorned with urns and statues, two rows of laborers stooped and rose in the sunlight; and not a song, not a word, not even the metallic grinding of the scythe on the whetstone, accompanied that task, which one might have mistaken for a hay-making scene in a penal colony, had it not been for the sumptuous surroundings. Suddenly a shrill, heart-rending cry — one of those meaningless, depressing shrieks which ascend from the gardens of insane asylums — rang from one end to the other of the vast estate, — from the terraces on the river bank to the entrance to the King's Pavement, the monumental gateway, where gilded, emblematic lictor's *fasces* recall the former functions of the grand master of the imperial cavalry. As that despairing wail passed over the lawns, not a head was raised, — the laborers were as impassive as the statues. One would have said that it was one of those noises to which the inmates of a house become so accustomed that they do not hear them. But in the

small corner salon, with the yellow silk hangings, where the Duc d'Alcantara was talking with the magistrate Delcrous, the conversation was abruptly broken off when the cry entered between the long, half-closed blinds.

"Just listen to that, my dear sir; is n't it frightful? Since the morning, when, in spite of all our efforts, she succeeded in having the door of the Phantom opened, when she saw her son on a trestle, with that death-mask eaten by vermin, the duchess has said nothing, recognized nobody; that ghastly shriek which she utters at intervals is the only sign of life about her. Now here am I, in my invalid's chair, between that dead boy and that mad woman. And you come and talk to me about letting the assassin go, taking from me even the joy of revenge!"

The paralytic's eyes, the seat of his nervous life, gleamed with rage; while the judge, sorely perplexed, argued and explained in confused sentences. — Monsieur le Duc could not doubt his zeal — the order of arrest that same evening — in secret confinement three days — and absolutely no result.

"He is fooling you. — You 're no match for him," growled the general.

"On the contrary, my dear duke — he seems to me to be doing his best to accuse himself, to heap up testimony against himself. It is inexplicable. I have absolute proof now that he did not arrive until Monday morning, two days after the murder. And as that scent grows weak, I

discover another, much more reliable, where everything coincides, — the hour, the day, the motive, and the reports of my agents, as well as anonymous letters which I am receiving."

Delcrous paused as a footman appeared on the stoop at the open door-window. "Who is there? I gave orders that we should not be disturbed," roared the general, in his military voice. The servant vanished in dismay. In his place a gigantic shadow filled the whole width of the door:

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Duc."

"Ah! it 's you, Sautecœur."

Hastily and noiselessly Delcrous stepped up to the general: "I beg you to receive this man; we will talk further after you have seen him."

The general shrugged his shoulders, and said, pointing to a door in the hangings: "Go in there; I will call you." — Then, turning toward the window: "Come in, Eugène."

The Indian, thin and shrunken, walking unsteadily, seemed to have newly risen from a sick bed. His voice, too, had lost its ring, although he strove to speak firmly and to stand erect, being in full uniform, under arms, and in his master's presence.

"Monsieur le Duc," he said, standing with his eyes on the carpet, "I beg you to accept my resignation."

"Why?"

"My son is going to America with his wife. The children want me to go with them; but not

until — until I have settled my account with the law."

The duke moved uneasily in his chair: "The law? Why, what has happened to you?"

"A villainous piece of work."

"Explain."

"I don't know whether I can," said the keeper, in a low tone. He leaned against the mantel, trembling so that the barrel of the gun slung over his shoulder beat a tattoo on the marble. He had to resume his erect posture to tell his story. A simple but ghastly story it was. Having been ordered out on Friday night to beat up a gang of poachers, he was returning home about two in the morning, when a man leaped from a window of his house, into the yard of the Hermitage, a few steps from him. It was very dark. He supposed it was a robber, fired at random, hit his man; and when he went up to him to see who it was —

A brutal voice cut him short:

"You lie."

The keeper reared under the insult:

"General!"

"I say that you lie. That was not the way you killed the prince. I am sure of it; I know what you did as well as if I were your conscience; but I want to hear you tell it yourself. Come, speak — but no, wait." — He called, sharply: "Delcrous!"

When he saw the Corbeil magistrate, before whom he had often testified in poaching cases,

enter the room in prompt response to the call, grave and stern, the Indian felt his knees tremble under him, as if the executioner had already placed his hand on his shoulder, saying: "Forward!" His great flat cheeks turned deathly pale, and hollows formed in them. Really, he had not thought that it would be so soon.

"Well, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction," said the duke, triumphantly, "I was — it seems to me — very nearly right in saying that the villain of whom we were speaking might not have committed the crime himself. — Come, Sautecœur, if you wish to be dealt gently with, tell us how it all happened — above all things, no trickery!" He fancied that his guard hesitated, and to spare him the shame of a confession, he suggested the words to him. — "Tell us, what did they promise you? What did they give you? — for of course you were not working on your own account?"

Sautecœur drew himself up, his cheekbones aflame, the veins in his forehead swelling with the effort he made to contain himself: "Possibly such things may be done for money; but after twenty-eight years of faithful service — thirteen at the Poste-aux-Lièvres and fifteen at the Hermitage — my master can't believe me capable of — No, no!"

"Why, you 're not going to tell us that your story of a moment ago was n't true, are you?" sneered the general, slightly disturbed.

"A moment ago, Monsieur le Duc, I lied to you on account of a stupid pride which I no longer

have any right to feel. The arm is caught, the whole body must follow it. — Very good, let it follow, *tonnerre de Dieu!* — it won't cost me so much to tell the truth as to hear what I just heard." — He drew himself up, with clenched fists, and began: "Ten days ago, in my boy's absence, an unsigned letter came to me at the Hermitage, telling me that, on the next night, between three and five o'clock, I might see, from the Pacôme gate, a man come out of my daughter-in-law's chamber, through the window. You see, in my day I have had family troubles of my own, — a wife I loved, who led me a deuce of a life! At last she went off with a gendarme from Montgeron, and left the child and me alone in our desert at the Poste-aux-Lièvres. A downright good-for-nothing! — That experience left me with a grudge against all women; and when my son got married I promised myself that I'd keep an eye on his store-room, and made up my mind, if anything went wrong, to take revenge for his misfortunes and my own at one stroke. That was well known in the neighborhood, and the people who wrote to me knew very well what they were doing."

"Did you keep the anonymous letter?" Delcrous asked.

"Pray let him finish," said the duke impatiently.

"That Friday, as it happened, we were all on foot to catch a parcel of heathens from Mainville who had been taking our best does. The letter

said between three and five. About three o'clock I left my station in the Gros-Chêne avenue, and went into ambush near the Pacôme gate. As true as this rifle is in my hand, I did n't know who my daughter-in-law was receiving in her bedroom. I had had some knowledge that the prince was hanging around; but, after a scene with the girl, I thought it was all over for that time, and the letter, as you will see, Messieurs, put a very different name from his into my head. I had been there half an hour, drenched to my bones in a pouring rain that never slackened, when I heard the rattle of a window-fastening. Some one jumped out, within ten feet of my hiding-place, and ran away. I could n't see well; I might have missed him if he had kept on running. Unluckily, he stopped to open a sort of umbrella he had, and I fired. The man walked a few steps very fast, then fell into the ditch and never stirred, like a beast that has had his death-blow. At that I ran to the house. The little one pretended to be asleep, with the bedclothes pulled up over her eyes. — 'Get up and take the lantern,' I said to her; 'I 've killed your lover; come and help me bury him.' — She was afraid, and she did n't make me speak twice, I promise you. At that moment I had no suspicion of what I was going to find at the end of my rifle-shot. The proof of what I say is that, when we were both in the ditch, beside the motionless body, I asked my daughter-in-law: 'Who is it?' — 'Look and see,' she says in a whisper, lowering the lantern.

— Ah! Monsieur le Duc, when I saw what I had done — " With the sleeve of his keeper's jacket he wiped his streaming forehead. The duke, watching the effect of the story on Delcrous, said to his keeper, in a perfectly calm tone:

"What was your gun loaded with?"

"Buckshot."

"And you hit him where?"

"The whole charge did n't take effect. There was only one hole, near the temple."

There was an awful pause, during which the mother's shriek rang out anew, as if she had seen the wound, the hole near the temple. Then the examination was resumed: "You say that he fell near the Hermitage. But he was not found there."

"We put him first in the bottom of one of the old quarries of which there are so many in that part of the forest, all filled with brambles and leaves. After we had got home again, chilled to the bone, it occurred to us to take him out of the quarry and lay him on the grass against the Fénigan park. The little one held the lantern, and I carried the body in my arms as if it was a child; I am very strong. It all happened just as I tell you."

The magistrate, in his corner, assumed a cunning air: "Why that open umbrella over his head?"

"I remembered a woman who was found dead under her umbrella in the forest of Fontainebleau, and who stayed on the same spot a whole week without being disturbed."

"And why against the Fénigan park?"

Sautecœur put out his neck, and replied in a faltering tone: "A wicked thought that, Monsieur Delcrous, — a cowardly thought that I punish myself for by confessing it to you. After all the talk about the prince and Madame Richard, there was a chance that the husband might be accused. But I ought to say that that thought would never have occurred to my daughter-in-law or me, if it had n't been for a letter the prince had in his pocket."

"We 're coming to it at last!" cried the duke, with savage vehemence. "Confess that you searched his pockets to get some papers that the husband wanted. Admit that, and we 'll let you go in peace."

The keeper, without replying, took from his jacket a letter and a notebook. "The Prince d'Olmütz," he said gravely, "had upon him, in addition to the articles which have been handed you, this card-case and this unsealed letter, partly written to one of his friends. He was waiting, before sending it, to find out whether he had a pleasant night. — Of course I should n't have read it, — but my head was in such a whirl, and my daughter-in-law kept saying to me all the time: ' Perhaps there 's something in it that will help us.' And it 's true that the letter proves all that I have said. You will see when you read it that I have n't lied, and also that the unfortunate young man set, with his own hands, the trap in which he found death."

He placed the last letter to Vallongue and a little tortoise-shell note-book on the shelf that was fastened to the easy-chair for the invalid's convenience.

"And the anonymous warning you received — where is that?" Delcrous inquired while the duke was reading.

"I have it here, if Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction desires to look at it."

"Let me see it. — A woman's writing, and not a woman of distinction. Ah! the devil!"

He started, and said to the keeper, in an undertone, as if he were afraid that the father would hear: "So you thought you were firing at Alexandre?"

"Yes," said the woodsman, with a nod.

The general, who was twisting his moustache fiercely, raised his eyes from the letter to Vallongue: "There are some things that I can't understand yet — the step you are taking at this moment, what is the object of it? — And why did n't you do it earlier?"

"Ah! the women, Monsieur le Duc! I yielded to the entreaties of my daughter-in-law, who is as afraid of her husband as she is of fire and wanted to hide the whole thing from him. The result is that the poor fellow has lived among us all these days without suspecting anything. He went to his shop, talked about the affair on the train with anybody and everybody — and you can imagine whether it turned my hair white! The idea that an innocent man should be in prison on

my account, that he might, perhaps, be co
victed!— At last, when we three were at dinn
yesterday, my son saw me push my plate aw
without eating, as I have often done these h
few days. — 'Tell us what 's the matter, father
— I could n't keep it back any longer; it w
stifling me too much; and I told him everythin
Ah! the poor boy, I thought he was going to f
dead from the blow I dealt him. His wife thre
herself on her knees at his feet, but he would n
so much as look at her; he forgot his own misfo
tune. 'No, no; we must think about father firs
Father has failed in his duty; he must make t
for lost time.' — Ah! there are moments in one
life— We threw our arms around each other
necks, sobbing. I swore that I would come t
you this morning — and I have come."

"All this rings true," muttered Delcrous.

"And agrees with what I have just read," sai
the general, regretfully. "The only thing i
that the physicians found no trace of the buck
shot in the decomposed face — and yet the bod
was in the wood only two days."

"A poacher's trick, Monsieur le Duc," sai
Sautecœur, with a shudder; "but I would hav
torn out my tongue rather than — "

Rather than tell that father that, to make hi
son unrecognizable, they had left him one whol
night hanging by his heels to a tree, with hi
head buried to the shoulders in an anthill.

The magistrate, with Charlexis' letter in hi
hand, said in the general's ear: "Did I not te

you that it was a bad scent? — Clearly, this man is the assassin; and if you wish to avenge yourself—"

"Avenge myself on this clown! No, my dear fellow, it was Fénigan that I wanted — but this man — "

"Especially when you consider that, with this letter on the files, it would be difficult to convict."

The duke reflected a moment, then rejoined with decision: "I agree with you, Delcrous. The prince's good name and that of our family would gain nothing by having the affair noised abroad, nor by the cynical confidences of these two young gentlemen. This is a most excellent opportunity for one of those convenient nonsuits — "

The magistrate with the wolf's teeth and wooden whiskers of the Le Nôtre type of architecture interrupted him hastily, and addressing Sautecœur, who stood erect and rigid, cap in hand: "You hear," he said; "Monsieur le Duc does not propose to follow up this unfortunate misadventure. Leave the country at the earliest possible moment, without a word to any one; whether you suffer any unpleasant consequences depends entirely on your prudence."

The keeper bowed. "Thanks, Messieurs." He turned at the door, before leaving the room, and said inquiringly: "And Monsieur Richard?"

"Have no fear on that score. Monsieur Richard will return to Uzelles before night."

At that promise of Delcrous, the general inter-

posed snappishly: "Before to-night? Why so? — You seem to be in a great hurry to have that brute regain possession of his wife!"

It was the cry of his hatred, of his invalid's jealousy, extorted from him even amid more painful anxieties, amid all the tortures of his paternal grief.

At Uzelles that evening, the elder Madame Fénigan and old Mérivet were sitting under the great paulownia by the front door, exchanging a few last dejected words, interrupted by long pauses, and by exclamations like the sparks of a dying fire, while gardeners and dairymaids were taking the air in the moonlight, on the road in front of the gate. The inexorable curfew hour had struck long before, but nobody had paid any heed to it; perhaps because of the exceptional beauty of the night or because discipline was relaxed in that depressed and disordered household. But what a contrast between the silence in those brightly lighted and deserted apartments on the ground floor and the noisy merriment of the servants, between that loud, indifferent laughter and the heart-broken tone of the two voices talking in low tones in the shadow of the sleeping tree.

"How far the air carries to-night! — I can hear some one walking on the bridge of Ris," said the proprietor of the Little Parish Church, who, since his return, was constantly with Richard's mother and wife.

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Richard, in blank amazement, not staying to listen to his mother's explanations, darted away under the arching hedgerow, with its dark, rustling foliage, fragrant with flowering linden, at the end of which a light gleamed and beckoned to him.

Lydie, in her *peignoir*, her lovely hair braided for the night, was writing in the lower room, at her husband's desk. She did not turn, thinking that it was Rosine who had come in, and did not raise her head until Richard stood beside her. Then there was an explosion of surprise, of frantic joy, of breathless words interrupted by kisses, by embraces: "Free! you are free!"

"Yes, the true culprit has been discovered."

She stared at him, in utter stupefaction: "What! The true culprit?"

Her emotion, the expression in her eyes drew from Richard the exclamation: "So you thought that it was I?"

"Yes," she whispered, for she had not the strength to lie. And her husband, no less confused than she, rejoined:

"To think that I believed the same thing about you!"

Lydie raised her head. "Is it possible?" Then, suddenly enlightened: "Oh! I understand now why you wrote to me to go away, why you allowed that judge to believe — You intended to be convicted in my place. — My husband! — my darling husband!"

She threw herself, sobbing, on his breast.

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XX.

"LYDIE! — Richard! — Come, lazy-bones, the last bell is ringing for mass."

Cousin Élise, who had been two days at Uzelles, was fluttering about under the windows of the Pavilion, calling to the young couple; while the bell of the Little Parish Church sent forth its clear tones into the silence of Sunday morning, and Mme. Fénigan appeared at the end of the hedgerow, with her majestic upper-middle-class bearing, a prayer-book with a gold clasp in one hand, and in the other her silk bag with its jangle of keys and rings.

"Where is Richard?" she inquired, as Lydie came down alone, fashionably dressed in black, in striking contrast to the bright and showy colors of Little Red-Riding-Hood's costume.

"We read till it was very late, and I dared not wake him," the young wife replied, flushing scarlet because of the falsehood; and she walked quickly toward the chapel, pulling on her gloves.

Although not precisely asleep, Richard lay stretched out in the great bed, his eyelids heavy with a delicious lassitude, and hovered on the borderland of sleep, soothed by the chimes of

Sainte-Irène, which floated in through the open window, with the plashing of the fountain at the corner and the clatter of the tin cup. Why had he not accompanied his wife and mother to mass? Doubtless because he dreaded to appear ridiculous, — the ennui of entering the church, of showing himself in public after so many things had happened. And yet his mother had learned mercy and human compassion in that humble church by the roadside; and it was from there that she had started to capture and bring back the fugitive. Yes, he owed a debt of gratitude to the Little Parish Church; and although it would cost his pride dearly, he certainly would go there some Sunday, soon.

The bell rang for the last time. — In his vague, half-slumber, Richard heard Chuchin the fish-keeper's cracked voice reminding him that they had to make a cast of the net near Île des Moineaux before the sun was too high. He jumped out of bed at once; and as he was going out found himself face to face with a decrepit old woman who was about leaving the house with a superb bunch of flowers which Rosine Chuchin had just given her. The tall maid-servant's confused, mysterious manner had puzzled him for some time. He retraced his steps, and asked her, suspiciously: "Who is that woman?"

"Mother Lucriot, from Draveil."

"And those flowers? What is she going to do with them?"

Rosine did not know. Madame Richard had

[illegible] to give La Lucrèce a bouquet every morning, nothing more. Richard asked no further questions, meaning it more dignified to apply to Lydie, but he felt that all his depression had returned. At the corner of the high road he met the congregation coming from mass — creaking [illegible] and rustling silks. In the Fenigan group Little Red-Riding-Hood was speaking with much earnestness, shaking her umbrella and her ribbons: "Just as you please, cousin. I don't care to pray for people I don't know. And then, if I had known I was to attend a mass for the dead, I would have worn a more quiet dress; I would have come in black, like Lydie."

"But I — I was not told beforehand," murmured Lydie, embarrassed by her husband's glance at her dark dress.

"In whose memory was the funeral mass this morning?" Richard asked.

"No one knows, not even Monsieur Mérivet," Élise replied, while Fenigan led his wife aside, and asked her, very low, very hurriedly:

"Do you know?"

"Yes."

"Is it the same person to whom you send flowers?"

She started in surprise, and replied, resolutely: "Yes, the same, — Père Georges." And that was all.

They had been so happy for two or three days; the waves which rocked them reflected such an abundance of sunlight, their movement was so

gentle, they sang such intoxicating music, that she had not dared to disturb their perfect happiness by casting into it her pitiful, humiliating story. Suppose he should cease to love her, knowing her to be a child of those wandering vagabonds, of a nomadic, hostile race? Above all else, she dreaded the explanation with her mother-in-law, although she was greatly changed, very affectionate and motherly, but blessed with an even more inflexible pride than her son's. And she postponed the inevitable explanation, relying on the influence of Abbé Cérès. Unfortunately, her husband's words and his preoccupied air warned her that her secret would soon cease to be hers alone.

Instead of going down to his boat, Richard walked straight along the road; he felt no further interest in the cast of the net. He was thinking of the mass, of those flowers, and, above all, of that mourning garb, an absurdly excessive manifestation of grief for the old wayfarer. No, it was improbable that it was all for Père Georges; there would not have been so much mystery about it. Who was it, then? The other, he who was sleeping in the park at Grosbourg, in the sumptuous family mausoleum? Could it be that she was still thinking of him? To set his mind at rest, one way or the other, he had only to call on the Lucriots, who lived higgledy-piggledy in a former roadmender's shanty just beyond Draveil; he could question the old woman. And while his steps led him almost unconsciously in that

direction, the road about him unfolded its usual Sunday panorama. Napoléon Mérivet, who had just closed his chapel, shook his great key threateningly at him in the distance; and Richard said to himself, fiercely: "Oh! no, he would never set foot in that church of pardon at any price, where you pray for those who injure you." — Next came the obsequious and catlike salutation of M. Alexandre, who passed him, with the hunting outfit and costume of Robin des Bois, although the hunting-season was not yet open. He was returning after a morning of rabbit-snaring in the Grosbourg preserves; and his game-bag, his rifle, his high gaiters, all were new, glistened and creaked with newness. Even the dog who followed, cowering timorously behind his master's leggings, seemed, after his five hours' hunting, like a pasteboard dog, just out of a box. — "Good sport, Monsieur Alexandre?" called the farm girls. The baker's wife, leaning out from under the hood of her wagon, also inquired, as she passed: "Good sport, Monsieur Alexandre?" — To one and all Alexandre replied in a careless, off-hand tone, as he had heard his masters say at the Château: "No, I have seen nothing." — Nor had the dog seen anything. But both he and his master had had to make the same reply so many times, that, when one of the roadmender's daughters, who was preparing her father's breakfast on the upturned wheelbarrow, called from afar: "Good sport, Monsieur Alexandre? Have you got anything for me?" the old flunkey turned as

if an asp had bitten him, and said, in a snarling tone, but with a gallant smirk: "Something for you, my girl? I always have something for you."

His tone was so amusing that Richard could not refrain from laughing; but the party that he encountered almost immediately thereafter cast him back upon his gloomy and corroding thoughts.

At the corner of the steep lane leading down to the bridge of Ris, a wagon-load of furniture had stopped. Two men — two giants — were bustling about, loosening the check-rein, readjusting the slackened ropes; then the younger Sautecœur's wife called out from in front: "Go on, Blanchette!" and the vehicle lurched heavily forward, followed by the two men walking side by side, without speaking. Richard, who had stepped aside in order not to embarrass the unfortunate people, watched them move away down the jolting incline, their tall shoulders quivering with what seemed like sobs. What a wrench that removal must be to a man of the old keeper's years; his forest, his Hermitage, his whole life wrecked and ruined, and all for a boyish freak. To be sure, the little villain had paid dear for his whim. So young, a great name, the richest entail in France, it was a pity that he should have had such a fate; and Lydie's emotion, her bouquets, her prayers, were really not blameworthy. Was it worth while for him to degrade himself by carrying out his plan of questioning that old Lucriot hag, amid slander and rags? — especially as the little cemetery was close at hand, and by

finding Père Georges' tomb he could tell as certainly whether his wife had lied. As he was walking swiftly in that direction, he met the Draveil musical society, which was taking its Sunday promenade, its banner in the van. They were marching out into the country in four close ranks, blowing lustily into their brass horns, puffing out their honest village cheeks, closely shaven, but showing the black line of the beard in the golden reflection of the lace on their caps, and marking time with a heroic rhythm which started up coveys of partridges from the cornfields.

Richard had reached a point where he could see the yews and white tombs over a high wall at the entrance of the village, when, assailed anew by his uncertainty, he sat down on a stone bench by the roadside. No, there was something altogether too base in this prying about after his reconciliation with Lydie; he would not stoop to it. Why not say to his wife simply: "I believed that I was cured, but I am not. I believed that his death put an end to it all, and here I am jealous even of the dead! I implore you to abandon this posthumous pity, since it rends my heart. I am too miserable." — As he reflected thus, he became calmer, the strain was relaxed, and gradually there stole over him, from that perfect Sabbath calm which surrounded him, from those motionless shadows, from those vast, deserted fields — fields of colewort and wheat, whose silvery and golden yellow waves stretched away to the verge of the forest — a sweet, refreshing

sensation, like that which comes to a wounded soldier to whom one gives a cooling draught after relieving him of the burden of his breastplate and its cruel straps.

How long did he stay in that same spot? The blaring trumpets of the musical society had passed and repassed, its brass and its medals glittering in the sun; then the cows from the farm, a wagoner or two, and the postman, "Rags, old iron to sell," the little hunchbacked shoe peddler with his melancholy cry, and all the familiar figures of the game of goose. Suddenly the angelus rang out in twenty little steeples, answering one another, breakfast bells jangled noisily in the courtyards of châteaux and villas; and not until then did Richard, as he rose to go, discover that he had been sitting on the pedestal of a tall iron cross that marked the spot where the former notary of Draveil, Maître Fénigan, had been stricken by apoplexy. His memory, more superstitious than affectionate, evoked the dim, distant image of the father he had hardly known. Was it from him that he inherited that inward scald, that horrible disease of jealousy which had infected his flesh and his blood? Was it hereditary in the Fénigans, like pride? one of those mysterious legacies not mentioned in last wills? "Oh! father, father," sighed poor Poum-poum, as he returned home, humming as in the old evil days, "had you but left me fewer mills and forests and fields, and not this ghastly wound, which I am sure will never be fully cured!"

Until evening a cloud rested on Uzelles, despite

the joyous clamor of Little Red-Riding-Hood The excellent creature had hurried thither as soon as she learned of the catastrophe, and had descended upon the examining magistrate; and Richard owed to her his speedy release from confinement. At Draveil, at Soisy, people had not failed to say: "Those Fénigans are so rich, there's no danger that the law will go slow with them." — In reality, Delcrous felt that he had not treated his friends well. But no matter! with the assistance of his love and a strong admixture of impudence, he had summoned courage to announce that he proposed to call on this Sunday evening; and you can conceive whether his call was discussed in the servants' quarters and at the gardener's lodge. As for Rosine Chuchin — who had caused the whole drama with her anonymous letter — when she heard the bell ring at the gate, she ran and shut herself up in the isba and dared not come out. In the salon, where the windows were open upon the fragrant, silent park, the man with the stiff black whiskers found the proper word to say to every one. His wolf's teeth gleamed before Little Red-Riding-Hood's plump, satiny flesh; and while he begged Lydie to take her place at the piano, he called Richard's attention and his mother's to a dithyrambic article in praise of the Fénigans, which had appeared that morning on the first page of the *Journal de Corbeil.* The article was signed *Verax* and abounded in turgid empty phrases, with superb gestures and flowing sleeves, of which it was easy to guess the author. Unfor-

tunately the same number contained the following lines:

"This Sunday morning mass was celebrated for the repose of the soul of the Prince d'Olmütz, in the small chapel at Grosbourg as well as at the principal churches in the vicinity, Draveil, Soisy, Ris, Athis and Morangis. After the service the Duc and Duchesse d'Alcantara, both of whom are very ill, started for the Engadine with Dr. Jean Metzer."

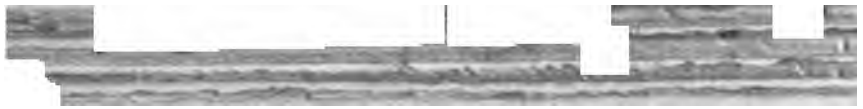
Richard, after gazing a long while at that item, as if he were spelling it out or translating it, walked to the piano, and placed the newspaper, folded and marked with his nail, on the music-rack in front of Lydie. "Now I know what I wanted to know. That is the man for whom you were praying this morning," he said under his breath. "The flowers were for him too, I suppose?"

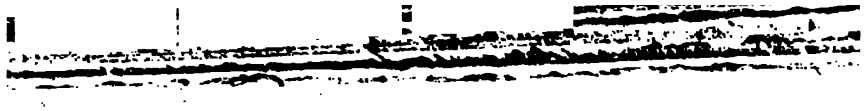
She raised her lovely, grieved eyes to his. "O Richard!" she said, but did not cease to play, the tears falling in great drops on the keys and on her long white hands, as they moved more and more slowly. Then, with a passionate gesture, she sprang to her feet, saying: "Come, you shall know everything."

"Where are you going, children?" cried the mother, in surprise; but they had already left the salon.

At the hour of mass on the following Sunday, Napoléon Mérivet, Chevalier of the Order of

Saint-Grégoire, as he stood on the steps of his church, doing the honors thereof with proper gradations of respect, was surprised and overjoyed to see Richard Fénigan arrive with his wife on his arm, — his dear little Mendelsohn, all in blue, like the saint in the stained-glass window. As they entered, doves circled around the steeple, flapping their wings, and the excellent old man, smiling gently, bowed a little lower than usual, with an affectionate and contented gesture of welcome.





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